

The Shijing as China's Epic

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The *Shijing* as China's Epic

MPhil. Thesis

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Abstract

There has been heated debate on whether China has an epic and what that epic should be. Some scholars think that China does not have an epic, while many others consider the five or six poems in the *Da Ya* 大雅 section of the *Shijing* 《詩經》 as epics. However, there are many problems with the definition of “*shi shi* 史詩 (epic poetry)”. This study aims to point out the highly problematic and contentious nature of the definition of “epic” and suggests instead to compare Homer and the *Shijing* directly as (1) the respective sources of Western and Chinese literature; and (2) as a form of traditional oral poetry found the world over. By reviewing the original meaning of “*επος*” in ancient Greek and recent applications of Homeric research on *Shijing* studies, this paper argues that in terms of metre, language, structure, and content, *the Shijing as a whole* is the closest equivalent to the Homeric epics in the Chinese literary tradition.

《詩經》作為中國之史詩

碩士論文

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摘要

關於中國有沒有史詩，一直存在很大爭議。有些學者認為中國沒有史詩，有些則認為《詩經·大雅》中的其中五首周民族詩就是史詩。可是，“史詩”的定義，其實存在很大問題。本文欲指出史詩在定義上的問題和爭議，建議直接比較《詩經》與《荷馬史詩》作為（1）中西方文學的源頭，和（2）《詩經》和《荷馬史詩》的共同口頭文學性質。結合荷馬學最近的研究成果，和重新審訂“史詩”一詞在希臘原文的定義，本文的結論就是《詩經》無論在語言、結構、內容、整體上（而非只是五首）都是中國文學裏最接近《荷馬史詩》的文學作品。

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ONE

Introduction

Definitions for the Epic

The idea of “epic” or “*shi shi* 史诗” in China did not come into being until the late nineteenth century, when China for the first time in her history sent students to study in the West. Before that, the genre simply did not exist in the Chinese literary tradition. Therefore, what we are describing now as “*shi shi* 史诗” is in fact a borrowed and translated concept. Like many translations in that period, the term “*shi shi* 史诗” was not directly translated from the original Greek, but only indirectly from the English:

“Epic: a long poem describing the deeds of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation.”¹

From this definition, we are principally informed about (1) the extended length of the poem; and (2) the heroic and historical content of the poem.

Most Chinese scholars use this definition as their point of departure when discussing the epic in China. Some, based on the first criterion of extended poetic length, argue that China does not have an epic. Others such as Chen (1981) and Deng (1986) view the five or six historical poems in the *Shijing* as epics, based on the second criterion of historical

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, ed. Simpson & Weiner, Clarendon Press, 1989.

content². Even the illustrious C.H. Wang and Xia Chuancai follow this view.³ However, singling out five or six poems from the *Da Ya* section and calling them “epics” is no more than forfeiting a Chinese genre in favour of a Greek one, which is exactly what the Chinese parable 削足适履 (*cutting one's foot to suit the shoe*) describes. This issue is further complicated by the misleading Chinese translation for “epic”, “*shi shi* 史诗”, which follows the English translation (too) closely and literally means “historical poetry”. This translation itself already dictates that an epic must have some sort of historical content. However, as we shall see, this definition is highly problematic.

Firstly, the criterion of historical content is misleading. The Trojan War was a collective memory of the Greeks and this event may indeed be considered historical. But the *Iliad* itself was not about the Trojan War. The first line of the *Iliad* already reads, “μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος” (*Sing, O goddess, of the anger of Peleus's son Achilles!*) Homer had already indicated in the beginning of his poem that this was about a hero and the consequences of his anger, not about the historical details of the Trojan War. In fact, the selective treatment of events in the poem reveals this point clearly. Throughout the entire poem, focused on only a few weeks in the tenth year of the war, we are not even informed of the fall of Ilium, or even the Trojan Horse. The poem simply ignores these

² Chen identifies the 《玄鸟》、《生民》、《公刘》、《绵》、《皇矣》 and 《文王》 as the six historical epics in the *Shijing*. See 陈铁骥(1981) “荷马史诗与《诗经》史诗的比较研究” 锦州师范学院学报. 1981 年 4 期 52-60 页; Whereas Deng identifies the 《生民》、《公刘》、《绵》、《皇矣》 and 《大明》 as the Five Zhou epics. See 邓乔彬(1986) “从荷马史诗与西周史诗谈中西文学” 华东师范大学学报. 1986 年 6 期 65-71 页.

³ 夏传才(1998) 《诗经语言艺术新编》北京：语文出版社. 173-174 页.
See C.H. Wang (1988) *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays in Early Chinese Poetry*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, where he even goes as far as calling the five historical poems in the *Da Ya* as the *Weniad*.

historical events and ends abruptly with Hector's funeral, a sign of Achilles' own imminent death. Hence, we can see, Homer's concern was story, not history. When we consider Homer's other epic, the *Odyssey*, the criterion of historical content becomes manifestly irrelevant. The Great Wanderings of Odysseus and his encounters with monsters and nymphs are clearly mythological and can hardly be described as historical at all. Recent research on oral poetic traditions have also found that the *Odyssey* actually belongs to a larger theme of "*Return Songs*" found in many cultures, most notably the South Slavic oral poetic tradition.⁴ Hence, the *Odyssey* is only one instance of a common story about a hero struggling to return home to reassert his authority. There is nothing historical about this kind of story, which can happen in any country and any historical context. Hence, the notion that an epic must have some sort of historical content is inaccurate and misleading.

The second problem is anachronism. The extended sense of "*long, heroic and historical*" is a modern generalization that did not come into being until the sixteenth century.⁵ In ancient Greece, the original meaning of epic or "*επος*" was very different from what we mean today. In ancient Greek, "*επος*" simply meant a "*word*", "*speech*" or "*utterance*".⁶ In poetry, it was used to denote a style of meter, the dactylic hexameter used by Homer. Throughout the ages, many more connotations had been attributed to the Greek word "*επος*". By the time of the Renaissance, an epic poem often had to (1) start with an invocation to the muses; (2) include a catalogue of ships; or (3) start *in media res*. These

⁴ J. M. Foley (1999) *Homer's Traditional Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. pp. 119-121.

⁵ T. Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (1594), book 1, trans. M. Cavalchini & I. Samuel, Oxford, 1973.

⁶ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition, ed. Liddell, Scott & Jones, Oxford, 1996.

were some of the criteria which Renaissance poets used for identifying epic poetry. For example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* follows these criteria closely. Although these criteria do describe certain aspects of epic poetry, they were essentially a Renaissance understanding of Homer, which was in many ways incomplete, arbitrary and now obsolete. The problem with this definition is that it relies too much on subjective interpretations of content and imitation of superficial forms (such as catalogues of ships), while other important aspects, such as oral language, metre and formulaic structure were overlooked or simply not yet well understood. Recent breakthroughs in Homeric studies, especially Parry and Lord's revolutionary work on oral poetic theory in the 1930s, has prompted modern scholars to reconsider what should be regarded as "epic". There are various oral poetic traditions, such as the sub-Saharan African epics or even Hesiod's *Works and Days*, which are not necessarily long or heroic in nature, but may still be regarded as epics based on their oral traditional features.⁷

Hence, the modern literary definition of "epic" is anachronistic in both ways. It is neither ancient and original, nor modern and comprehensive. In fact, it is often confounded with the lay meaning of "epic", which means nothing more than grandeur in scale or size.

What we are concerned here is the definition of the *literary genre* of "epic". Therefore, before we engage into any productive discussion of the epic in China, we should first be careful to (1) avoid a literal interpretation of "*shi shi* 史诗" as historical poetry; (2)

⁷ In fact, there has been a controversial debate between Finnegan and Mulokozi on whether sub-Saharan African poetry should be counted as "epic". What concerns us here, however, is to point out the highly contentious and problematic nature of the current definition of "epic", so that in our ensuing discussion of the epic in China, we may be aware of the limitations of any one definition. For more on the debate of the definition of epic, see Barbara Graziosi, *The Homerizon: Conceptual Interrogations in Homeric Studies*, Homer and the Definition of Epic, <http://chs.harvard.edu/publications.sec/classics.ssp>. Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, DC. September, 2006.

discern between the lay meaning of “epic” and the literary genre of “epic”; (3) ascertain the original meaning of “επος” in ancient Greek as far as possible; and (4) review current approaches which scholars use to define and understand the “epic”.

The Original Meaning of “επος”

The first appearance of the word “επος” in ancient Greek texts is in the Homeric epics themselves. In both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the word “επος” was used to denote a “word”, “speech” or “utterance”. For example, in *Iliad* γ 83, “επος” was used to describe an “utterance” or “speech” that Hector was about to say in the battlefield. In *Odyssey* μ 266, “επος” was used to describe the “word” of the blind prophet Teiresias. Although one may argue that in this case “επος” may be read as “story” of the blind prophet, it is more accurate to read it as “word” or “utterance” of a deity or oracle, as is attested in Herodotus’s *Histories* 1.13.2, “τουτου του επεος Λυδοι τε και οι βασιλεις αυτον λογον ουδενα εποιουντο.” (an **utterance** to which the Lydians and their kings paid no regard until it was fulfilled.)

Another piece of internal evidence in reading “επος” as “word” can be found in *Odyssey* β 272, “οιος κεινος εεν τελεσαι εργον τε επος τε.”⁸ (*Such a man he was for word and*

⁸ The Homeric texts used for our current study are based on:

Homer. *The Iliad*. Translated by Murray, A T. Loeb Classical Library. Volumes 1, 2. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1924.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Murray, A T. Loeb Classical Library. Volumes 1, 2. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1919.

deed.) Here, “επος” (word) contrasts oppositely with “εργον” (deed). This phrase is repeated several times throughout both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as a formulaic expression. Other common readings for “επος” include “τελεσαι επος” (*to keep one’s word*) in *Iliad* θ 8; and “επε’ ακρααντα” (*words of no effect*) in *Odyssey* τ 565 etc., all of which point to the reading as “word”, “utterance” and “speech”, but not as “story” or “narrative”.

Another point worth mentioning is that Homer never refers to the songs that Achilles or Demodokos sing as “επος”. Instead, they were always described as “αιδιη” (*songs*) or with the verb “αιδω” (*sing of ...*). For example, “μηνιν αιδε (sing of the wrath of Achilles, A 1)”, “αιδε κλεα ανδρων (sing of the glory of men, I 189)” or “αιδειν αμφ’ Αρεος φιλοτητος τ’ Αφροδιτης (sing of the love between Ares and Aphrodite, θ 266)”. “Επος” was never the direct object of “αιδω”. Homer also never uses “επος” in the plural form “επεα”, which is the common form for the later acquired sense of a complete story or narrative.

It was not until Pindar and Herodotus in the 4th and 5th century B.C. that “επος” assumes its plural sense. For example, Herodotus describes “τα Κυπρια επεα” (*The Cyprian verses*) in his *Histories* 2.117. And Pindar in his *Nemean Odes* 2.2 writes “ραπτον επεον τα πολλ’ αιδοι” (*the singers of woven verses*). However, there is still no evidence that “επεα” had acquired the sense of a complete story or unified narrative yet. Rather, it can be equally justified and even more appropriate to interpret “επεα” as “verses”, which explains the plural ending better.

The Ancients' Definition of "επος"

The first and perhaps most influential of all ancient discussions on "επος" is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle was the first to define epic in terms of both metre and content.

Although Aristotle's main focus is on mimesis and dramatic value, he never forgets to mention the epic metre as a necessary part of the epic. This is very important, as it shows that in ancient Greece, it was a common practice first and foremost to classify poetry by metre. Aristotle's *Poetics* was a reaction to this kind of classification. Instead, he favoured a classification based on object of mimesis and dramatic value. For example, he writes,

"οὐδεν δε κοινον εστιν Ὁμηρῳ και Ἐμπεδοκλει πλην το μετρον"⁹

(Empedocles and Homer have nothing in common save the use of meter.)

His argument eventually forms the foundation for his judgement of the superiority of tragedy as a genre.¹⁰ Hence, we must be very careful when reading Aristotle's *Poetics*, as it was written with a purpose to establish tragedy as the βελτιους (*best*) of all forms of poetry, a view quite prevalent during Aristotle's time, but now obsolete. What we can be sure of, however, is that the term "epic" was used as a widespread expression for describing the *metrical* nature of Homer before Aristotelian interpretations were attributed to the genre later.

⁹ Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* (1953) London: Dent. Ch. 1, 47b 17-20.

¹⁰ Hogen, J.C. (1973) "Aristotle's Criticism of Homer in the *Poetics*" *Classical Philology*, Vol. 68, No. 2, pp. 95-108.

In fact, the Roman scholar Quintilian (c. AD 30-100) classified poetry solely by meter and grouped Homer with Hesiod and Virgil with Lucretius.¹¹ As for their own interpretations on content, Quintilian and Manilius (fl. AD 14) identified *various* kinds of “epic”, such as the *mythological* epic, the *historical* epic, the *didactic* epic, the *miniature* epic, and the *comic* epic.¹² The only thing that these “epics” had in common with one another was their metre. Hence, we can see that, although early definitions of the “epic” varied, one single fundamental trait of “*επος*” remained common to all, that is its metre or “*εν επεσι*” (*in epic meter*). This phrase appears frequently in ancient discussions of the epic. For example, the 2nd century Greek scholar Diogenes Laertius, among others, describes:

“Ξενοφανες Δεξιου η... γεγραφε δε *εν επεσι* και ελεγειας και ιαμβους”¹³

(*Xenophanes son of Dexios... wrote in epic metre, also elegiacs and iambs*)

In fact, when describing the dactylic hexameter, the word “*επος*” is vastly more common (1290 counts) than either “*εξαμετρος*” (*hexameter*) (19 counts) or “*δακτυλος*” (*dactyl*) (119 counts (*already including the original meaning of “finger”*)).¹⁴ This highly suggests that the phrase “*εν επεσι* (*in epic meter*)” was used as a common expression for the more technical term “dactylic hexameter”.

¹¹ Hainsworth, B. J. (1991) *The Idea of Epic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.138.

¹² Toohey, P. (1992) *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives*. London: Routledge. pp. 2-6.

¹³ D.Laërtius (c. AD 200) *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. C.D. Yonge, London: George Bell & Sons, 1895. Ch. IX, 18.

¹⁴ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition, ed. Liddell, Scott & Jones, Oxford, 1996.

Given such scanty use of “ἑξαμετρος” (*hexameter*) and “δακτυλος” (*dactyl*), there is reason to believe that originally the word “επος” was a common term used to stand for a particular metre of poetry known as the “dactylic hexameter” used by Homer.

Pindar, Herodotus and Aristotle all refer to the dactylic hexameter as *epic* hexameter. In addition, Greek tradition always classifies poetry first and foremost by their metre.

Iambic, elegiac, etc. were all classified in this way from ancient times up till today.

Whether the poem developed a secondary meaning or not, was a much later development.

For example, it simply happened that Archilochus had an inclination to write invective poetry in iambic trimeter, that invective poetry became associated with the iambic trimeter. But the iambic trimeter itself did not imply invective poetry in the first place. It simply meant three iambs, or three clusters of a short syllable followed by a long syllable.

Similarly, since Homer wrote in dactylic hexameter, his poetry was classified as “*epic*”, meaning poetry done in dactylic hexameter, or six clusters of long-short-short syllables. It was only *after* Homer wrote such a long narrative in epic metre, that long narratives became associated with the metre known as “*epic*”. But “*epic*” itself originally did not stand for long narratives. In fact, as we have seen, “*epics*” were not limited to long narratives, as there were also miniature epics and comic epics as mentioned by authors such as Quintilian and Manilius.

Furthermore, “*epic*” in its original sense simply meant a “*word*”, “*speech*” or “*utterance*”, as is attested in the Homeric epics themselves. The extended sense of a long narrative did not come into being until after Aristotle wrote his *Poetics* and put forward his own views

on epic and tragedy, which was not totally unbiased. Unlike in the Renaissance, this Aristotelian interpretation was also not unanimously adopted by various ancient authors. The only aspect of “epic” that has been widely agreed on by various ancient authors was their metre. Hence, based on the above review and analysis, we contend that the word “epic” in ancient times was merely a common and convenient expression for “dactylic hexameter” and was primarily a metrical qualification.

The Greek Hexameter and the Chinese Tetrameter

Hence, when we talk about the epic in China, one basic quality (*but not the least*) that should be counted is its metre. Therefore, the *Sanguo Yanyi* (三國演義) cannot be considered as epic poetry because of its lack of metre. Among the various styles of metre in the Chinese poetic tradition, the *Shijing* tetrameter is the closest equivalent to the Greek dactylic hexameter for the following reasons. First, it was the most simple and basic metre in the Chinese poetic tradition, with only four characters per line.¹⁵ It formed the basis for the later Chinese pentameter, which evolved directly from the *Shijing* tetrameter.¹⁶ Likewise, in the Greek poetic tradition, the Homeric dactylic hexameter was also one of the most basic metres, which had a lasting influence on other metres such as the elegiac metre.¹⁷ Second, the *Shijing* tetrameter was the most ancient, solemn and revered metre in the Chinese literary tradition. It was the first standardized form of metre used extensively in formal occasions such as celebrations (頌), apothegms (箴),

¹⁵ Although there were also other metrical lengths in the *Shijing*, the tetrameter was the dominant form.

¹⁶ See 孙立尧 (2006) “四言诗虚字中心说” *中国韵文学刊*. 第20卷. 第4期. 2006年12月. 33-35页 for transitional examples such as 不醉且无归、终朝采其华、习习谷风兴.

¹⁷ A.W. H. Adkins (1985) *Poetic Craft in the Early Greek Elegists*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. p. 74.

elegies, eulogies (祭), praise poetry (贊), panegyrics (誄), stele inscriptions (碑) and bronze engravings (銘).¹⁸ Similarly, the epic hexameter was also considered the most grand and solemn meter in the Western tradition, which has been an object of imitation by Virgil and other Silver Age Roman poets for centuries.

The Shijing as China's Epic

Understanding the *Shijing* tetrameter in terms of its influence on later poetry and status within the Chinese literary tradition leads us to Ford's (1997) argument on the definition of the epic. Ford (1997) points out insightfully that in our current discussion of the epic, there are at least two definitions being evoked. One with Homer at the head of a Western literary tradition that runs from Apollonius of Rhodes through Virgil, on to the Renaissance and beyond. The second, with equal justice, would view Homeric poetry as one instance of a type of traditional oral poetry to be found the world over, including cultures far outside the influence of the West.¹⁹ In fact, the debate on Sub-Saharan African epic was essentially a conflict between these two contending definitions.

However, for the *Shijing*, both of these definitions can coexist without conflict because on the one hand the *Shijing* is the cardinal and cornerstone work in the Chinese literary and poetic tradition. On the other hand, C.H. Wang's (1974) meticulous analysis has proved that the *Shijing* at the same time belongs to an oral poetic tradition found in many

¹⁸ See 郑水心 (1962) 四言诗的塑型. 香港中文大学联合书院学报. 1962 年 6 月. 第 1 期. 10-14 页.

¹⁹ Ford, A (1997) "Epic as Genre." in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Barry B. Powell & Ian Morris (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 398-416.

early cultures the world over.²⁰ Hence, in the case of the *Shijing*, both of Ford's criteria for the epic are fulfilled simultaneously.

The view that the *Shijing* and Homer should be compared as the respective sources of Chinese and Greek civilization is not new. Wu (1984) had already discussed this before.²¹ A more recent discussion of this problem can be found in Wang (2001), where he justifies the comparison between the *Shijing* and Homer on the grounds that they were both the respective sources of Chinese and Greek literature.²² In other words, both of them recognized the first criterion of Ford's argument. However, the second criterion, which is the significance of the *Shijing*'s oral traditional nature, was not given as much attention. As we shall see, it is in this aspect that the *Shijing* shares the most in common with Homer, namely that they both share a similar traditional language, structure and content characteristic of an oral poetic tradition.

²⁰ C.H. Wang (1974) *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²¹ 吴德安 (1984) “《诗经》和荷马史诗——谈谈文学的民族个性” *外国文学研究* (武汉), 1984 年 4 月, 110-115 页.

²² 王长华 (2001) 《诗论与子论》北京: 学苑出版社, 12-20 页.

TWO

The *Shijing*'s Epic Language

Variants and Synonyms

One of the most striking features when one reads the *Shijing* is its copious vocabulary and abundance of variants and synonyms. For example, there are nine different characters for the word *beginning*, “初、哉、首、基、肇、祖、元、胎、俶”;²³ twelve characters for the word *shore* or *bank*, “岸、泮、干、濇、廌、湄、浒、滨、频、浹、浦、濱”; and four different characters for the word *partner*, “逯、伋、特、仇”, all essentially meaning the same.²⁴ Interestingly, this abundance of forms is also found in Homer. In Homeric Greek, there are at least four forms for the common word *house*, “δομος”, “δωμα”, “οικος” and “οικια”; five forms for the 1st person singular genitive personal pronoun, “εμειο”, “εμεο”, “εμεθεν”, “εμεν”, and “μεν”. Even the familiar infinitive “*verb-to-be*” has five different forms “ειναι”, “εμεναι”, “εμμεναι”, “εμεν” and “εμμεν”, which all mean the same.²⁵ Why do both the *Shijing* and Homeric poems have such a richness of alternatives and colourful spectrum of variant forms for the same word? This can be explained by the traditional poetic nature of the oral language of the *Shijing* and Homer.

²³ 夏传才(1998)《诗经语言艺术新编》北京：语文出版社。17页。

²⁴ 向熹(1987)《诗经语言研究》成都：四川人民出版社。193页。

²⁵ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon. pp. 130-134.

Traditional Oral Language

Both the *Shijing* and Homer share an amalgamated and artificial language that comes from a long tradition of oral poetry handed down through time. This rich oral language was the result of an extended period of oral poetic accumulation, in which old forms were retained by tradition while new forms were added, spanning many centuries before settling on a stabilized text. The abundance of forms is generally taken to be a temporal accumulation rather than a geographical distribution. As Wang Li (王力) had pointed out, “I have analyzed the 15 *Guo Feng* separately but found no obvious traces of dialect differences.”²⁶ Dobson (1968), Xiang (2001) and most scholars today also agree with Wang Li that the *Shijing* as a whole exhibits a linguistic coherency, despite its complicated mixture of variant forms.²⁷

Likewise, the language of Homer is also a complicated admixture of Aeolic, old Ionic, Attic and Doric forms. However, Homer’s language also exhibits a linguistic coherency more homogenous than it seems, as the proportion of Aeolic and Ionic words are maintained constant throughout the Homeric text. The existence of anomalous Arcadian and Cyprian forms such as “ποτι”, “λαος”, “ἔρω”, and “δενδρεον” may suggest linguistic sources from Arcadia and Cyprus. However, it is ruled out that Homer himself got these words from Arcadia and Cyprus, as both districts lay outside his orbit, and he nowhere reproduces the essential characteristics of their dialect. Therefore, this

²⁶ 王力 (1985) 《汉语语音史》. 北京：中国社会科学出版社. 11 页.

²⁷ Dobson (1968) *The Language of the Book of Songs*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p. xxvi.
向熹 (2002) 〈《诗经》语文论集〉成都：四川民族出版社. 35 页.

amalgamated but linguistically coherent language can only be explained by a gradual accumulation of an ancient stock of words that have become fossilized and organically incorporated in a functional oral poetic tradition handed down by time-honoured generations of epic poets.²⁸

One of the consequences of this amalgamated oral language is that it is highly elastic, flexible and malleable. Both the *Shijing* and Homer share in this peculiarity of oral language. For example, In Homer variant forms abound. For instance, the participle “ορων” can be written as “οροων”; The participle “κεκληγοντες” has the variant form of “κεκληγωτες”. In dative plural nouns, we find three variations for every noun, “ποσι”, “ποσσι” and “ποδεσσι”. The common word for “dog” can be written as either “κυσι” or “κυνεσσι”. In verbs compounded with prepositions, we find the same word compounded both with and without apocope, such as “καταθνησκων” and “καταθανε”, or “κατεβαλλε” and “καββαλε”, and many other cases.²⁹

Likewise, in the *Shijing* we find 爱 as a variant of 薳 as in “爱而不见，搔首踟蹰。”（《邶风·静女》）；or 取 as 娶 as in “取妻如之何？必告父母。”（《齐风·南山》）and “岂其取妻，必齐之姜？”（《陈风·衡门》）；甲 as 狎 as in “能不我甲。”（《卫风·芄兰》）；革 as 革羽 in “如鸟斯革。”（《小雅·斯干》）；乐 as 疗 in “可以乐饥。”（《陈风·衡门》）；

²⁸ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 145.

G.S. Kirk (1962) *The Songs of Homer*. Cambridge University Press. p. 192.

²⁹ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 130-134.

害 as 曷 in “害澣害否。”（《周南·葛覃》）；皇 as 匡 in “四国是皇。”（《幽风·破斧》）；莫 as 暮 in “岁聿其莫。”（《唐风·蟋蟀》）；or 莫 as 谋 in “秩秩大猷，聖人莫之。”（《小雅·巧言》）；and 鬻 as 育 as in “鬻子之闵斯”（《幽风·伐柯》）³⁰

This phenomenon in the Chinese literary tradition has traditionally been explained as *jiajie* 假借, where words without a written form were substituted or “borrowed” by simpler words with a similar pronunciation. However, why would the *Shijing* poet borrow 鬻 to substitute for 育 as in 鬻子之闵斯（《幽风·伐柯》）? The word 育, being much simpler than 鬻, occurs six times in all four sections of the *Shijing*. Why would the *Shijing* poet choose to *jiajie* 假借 a more complicated character for a simpler one that already exists? In this and other instances, the *jiajie* 假借 explanation falls short.

In fact, many traditional Chinese scholars have complained about the confusing forms of the language of the *Shijing*. For example, Xia (1998) complains that the abundance of variant forms causes “great confusion” and that the abundance of *jiajie* 假借 forms was a result of a “primitive language that fell short of words and precision”.³¹ However, this complaint is misplaced because the *Shijing* belongs to oral literature and should not be appraised using standard literary critique based on written literature. It is also misguided to suggest that the *Shijing* falls short of words and precision. With over 2800 characters,

³⁰ 夏传才(1998) 《诗经语言艺术新编》北京：语文出版社。16-17 页。

³¹ *ibid.* 17 页。

how could the *Shijing* be short of words?³² The use of the words in the *Shijing* is also far from being imprecise. Consider the verbs for plucking, 采、掇、捋、芣、芣、禴、拊、执、秉, which are all very precise descriptions of subtle movements of the hand. Or consider the verbs for seeing, 瞻、望、相、监、见、覲、观, which are all very specific manners of looking.³³ In fact, if we compare this phenomenon with Homer, an interesting aspect of oral poetry in the *Shijing* can be observed. Snell (1953), in his famous study of Homeric vocabulary, points out that the words regularly used to describe the act of seeing, such as “παπταινεν”, “δερκεσθαι”, “λενσσειν”, etc., all designate concrete operations such as “peering”, “staring”, “glancing”, and so on. There is not a single abstract word in Homeric Greek that covers the general meaning “to see”.³⁴ This is exactly the same case in the *Shijing*, where 瞻、望、相、监、见、覲、观 are all very specific manners of seeing. Hence, if we can appreciate the language of the *Shijing* and Homer as characteristic of an early oral language, then many previously unnoticed aspects of *Shijing* scholarship may be illuminated from a Homeric perspective and vice versa.

³² According to Xiang Xi, there are at least 2826 distinct characters in the *Shijing*.

向熹(1987)《诗经语言研究》成都：四川人民出版社。145页。

³³ For example, 瞻 is to look forward or upwards; 望 is to look faraway; 相 is to look closely or examine; 监 is to check and inspect; 见 is to see or appear; 覲 is to meet; and 观 is to observe or visit.

See 向熹(1997)《诗经词典》成都：四川人民出版社。

³⁴ B. Snell (1953) *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European thought*. New York: Harper. (trans. T.G. Rosenmeyer). pp. 1-5.

Emphatic Particles and Xuci 虚词

Another aspect which the *Shijing* and Homer both share are a category of words known as emphatic particles. In the *Shijing*, these particles are known as *xuci* 虚词 and were used extensively to add emotional nuance to the poetry or aid the completion of the meter or the rhyme of the line. Similarly, the Homeric poems also had a category of emphatic particles, such as “*γαρ*”, “*γε*”, “*δη*”, “*και*”, “*μεν...δε*”, “*μην*”, “*περ*” and “*τοι*”, which were used extensively throughout the Homeric epics to add nuance and emotional emphasis to the poetry. For example, “*και*” was a conjunctive particle that had an intensive or heightening force.³⁵ A series of two “*και*” formed the copulative phrase “*και...και*”, such as “*και τοτε και νυν*” (*both now and then*) which gives extra emphasis to the copulative sequence, “*and now and then*”. This is very similar to the *Shijing* conjunctive formula “载…载…” , as in poem 245 《生民》 “载震载夙，载生载育。” , where the character 载 is repeated to give an extra emotional nuance to the copulative sequence, “*and she became pregnant; and she dwelt retired ; and she gave birth to; and she nourished [a son]*.”³⁶

Another class of emphatic particles, known as confirmatory particles, were used to suggest a tone of certainty and assurance to the sentence, such as “*μην*” and “*τοι*”, which functioned more or less like the English *surely* or *indeed*. For example in *Iliad* ψ 410, Odysseus says, “ὦδε γάρ ἐξερέω, καί μῆν τετελεσμένον ἔσται.”

³⁵ Smyth, Herbert Weir (1956) *Greek Grammar*. Harvard University Press. p. 650.

³⁶ James Legge (trans.) (1898) *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

(*For thus I will declare, and **surely** it shall be accomplished*). Here, “*μην*” adds a force of certainty and conviction to Odysseus’ speech that he shall surely accomplish his task.

“*τοι*”, in particular, was used to confirm statements of general truth or expressions of personal conviction, adding an emphatic confirmatory emotion to one’s speech.³⁷ For example, in *Iliad* Δ 405, “ἡμεῖς **τοι** πατέρων μέγ’ ἀμείνονες εὐχόμεθ’ εἶναι.”

(*We **indeed** claim we are better men by far than our fathers.*) Here, “*τοι*” adds extra emphasis on “*we*” as better than our fathers. And in *Odyssey* ρ 572, “ἄσσοτέρω καθίσασα παρὰ πυρὶ: εἵματα γὰρ **τοι**.” (*and seat me closer to the fire, for I’ve wretched clothes, **indeed**.*) “*τοι*” is situated at the end of the line, emphasizing Odysseus’ statement that his clothes are “wretched **indeed**”.

In fact, this is very similar to the Chinese particle 也, which also adds an emphatic confirmatory tone to the sentence. For example in poem 46 《墙有茨》 “墙有茨、不可埽也。中冓之言、不可道也。”³⁸, the poet emphatically expresses his firm conviction that “*the story of the inner chamber cannot be told **indeed***.” Or in poem 58 《氓》 “士之耽兮、犹可说也、女之耽兮、不可说也。”³⁹, the poet expresses a statement of general truth that, “*When a gentleman indulges in such pleasure (romance), something may still be said for him; (But) when a lady does so, nothing can be said for her **indeed**.*”

³⁷ Smyth, Herbert Weir (1956) *Greek Grammar*. Harvard University Press. p. 669.

³⁸ “*The tribulus grows on the wall, And cannot be brushed away.*

The story of the inner chamber, Cannot be told.”

James Legge (trans.) (1898) *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

³⁹ Legge translates 说 literally as “*said*” here. But a more general view would be to read 说 as 脱, meaning “*to escape*” (from love). *ibid*.

Another class of particles, “δη” and “περ”, function as emotional intensifiers, adding exclamatory emotion to the word preceding it.⁴⁰ For example, “‘απαντες δη” (*absolutely all*), “κρατιστοι δη” (*the very best*), or “μαχετ’, αχθυμενος περ ‘εταιρου.” (*he fought, grieving greatly for his comrade. Iliad P 459*), all of which enhance or intensify the word preceding the particle. Again, in the *Shijing*, both 兮 and 矣 carry a similar exclamatory and intensifying function. For example, in poem 55 《淇奥》 “瑟兮僩兮、赫兮咺兮。有匪君子、终不可谖兮！”⁴¹, the solemnity 瑟, dignity 僩, elegance 赫 and accomplishment 咺 of the prince are all enhanced by the *xuci* 虚词 particle 兮. The inability to forget such a prince is emotionally intensified by the 兮 at the end of the line 终不可谖兮. Or consider poem 69 《中谷有蓷》 “中谷有蓷，嘆其干矣。有女仳离，慨其叹矣。慨其叹矣，遇人之艰难矣！”⁴², where the dryness 干, the sighs 叹, and the “hard lot 艰难” are all emphasized and enhanced by the particle 矣 at the end of the line. Hence, we can see that both the *Shijing* and Homer share the use of emphatic or *xuci* 虚词 particles extensively in their poetry.

These colourful particles, while adding nuance and emotion to the poetry, also served as indispensable units to fulfil the metrical requirements of oral poetry. For example, 矣

⁴⁰ Smyth, Herbert Weir (1956) *Greek Grammar*. Harvard University Press. p. 646.

⁴¹ “How grave is he and dignified! How commanding and distinguished! Our elegant and accomplished prince, -- Never can he be forgotten!” James Legge (trans.) (1898) *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁴² “In the valleys grows the mother-wort, But scorched is it in the drier places . There is a woman forced to leave her husband; Sadly she sighs! Sadly she sighs! She suffers from his hard lot.” James Legge (trans.) (1898) *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

besides adding exclamatory emotion to the poetry, can also be construed as a terminal rhyme augment (句尾韵) as in poem 50 《定之方中》 “升彼虚矣，以望楚矣” to complete the meter and rhyme. Similarly, 思, originally meaning “*thinking of*”, can also set aside its original meaning and be used as a *xuci* 虚词 particle to complete the meter and rhyme, as in “神之格思，不可度思，矧可射思。”(《大雅·抑》). As well as 忌, as in “叔善射忌，又良御忌。抑罄控忌，抑纵送忌。”(《郑风·大叔于田》) or 只, as in “母也天只，不谅人只。”(《庸风·柏舟》).⁴³ In some cases where the line was too short, a combination of two *xuci* particles can be used to complete the meter, such as combining 只 and 且 to give “既亟只且！”(《邶风·北风》) and “其乐只且！”(《王风·君子阳阳》) or combining 薄 and 言 to give “薄言采之”(《周南·芣苢》)、 “薄言归还”(《召南·采芣》)、 or “薄言駟者”(《鲁颂·駟》).⁴⁴ Hence, we can see that the use of these *xuci* particles was very flexible and adaptable in the *Shijing*.

Flexibility and Malleability of Oral Language

This flexibility is characteristic of traditional oral poetry, as the oral poet often enjoyed considerable liberties to make his spoken language more malleable and elastic in order to suit the meter and other poetic requirements for oral improvisation. In fact, the need to complete the meter in oral poetry was so demanding, that in Homer, even the tense augment ε was omitted throughout the epics wherever it was necessary. As Bowra (1930) had pointed out,

⁴³ 向熹(1987) 《诗经语言研究》成都：四川人民出版社，76-78页。

⁴⁴ 孙立尧(2006) “四言诗虚字中心说” 《中国韵文学刊》，第20卷，第4期，29页。

“The fact remains that in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, there are over six thousand cases of the neglected augment, and this neglect is really a literary artifice employed in the interests of the meter. Words like *εφερομην*, which scanned three shorts and a long, could be reduced to *φερομην*, words like *ελαθον*, *εβαλε*, *εφερε*, which scanned as tribrachs, could be made into two shorts, *λαθον*, *βαλε*, *φερε*. So, too, other impossible scansion, such as *εκεκαδοντο*, *εβουλευσατο*, *ωλεκοντο*, could be reduced to fit into the hexameter.”⁴⁵

The omission of the augment shows that epic poets like Homer took considerable liberties with early oral language, just as *Shijing* poets took considerable liberties when using variant forms, *jiajie* 假借 words and *xuci* 虚词 particles when composing their poetry. Hence, if we can appreciate the oral traditional nature of the *Shijing*'s language from a Homeric perspective, then previously deemed chaotic and untidy forms such as variant *jiajie* 假借 words and confusing *xuci* 虚词 particles may be understood in a new light as flexible and malleable elements of traditional oral poetry.

Another aspect which shows the flexibility and malleability of traditional oral language is that words were seldom bound by one meaning. For example, according to Duan Yucan 段玉裁 (1735-1815), 嘆 and 歎 should be different, with 歎 being associated with joy and 嘆 with sorrow.⁴⁶ However, in the *Shijing*, both can be used interchangeably, as in “嘅其嘆矣。” (《王风·中谷有蓷》) and “况也永歎。” (《小雅·常棣》), without being strictly bound by either definition. Similarly, according to the *Shuowen*, 歎 is “to recite”, whereas 嘯 is the sound of “blowing wind”. However, in the *Shijing* this distinction is not made, as in “其嘯也歌。” (《召南·江有汜》) and “条其歎

⁴⁵ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 148-149.

⁴⁶ According to 段玉裁 (1735-1815), 古歎与嘆义别, 歎与喜乐为类, 嘆与怒哀为类。见《段注说文解字》王琮珊编。台北: 广文书局。1969年。歎 416 页; 嘆 61 页。

矣。”（《王风·中谷有蓷》），both meaning the same thing. Again, according to the *Shuowen* 《说文》，管 and 箎 are two different musical instruments. However, in the *Shijing*, both are used to refer to the *same* musical instrument, as in “萧管备举。”《周颂·有瞽》）and “磬筦将将。”《周颂·执竞》）。

Hence, we can see that in early Chinese poetry, the oral poet employs a young speech which has not yet settled to fixed forms and uses. Likewise, in early Greek poetry, this flexibility is also manifest in Homer. For example, in Lesbian Greek, “ $\chi\theta\omega\nu$ ” means “earth” as opposed to sea, while “ $\gamma\alpha$ ” means “earth” in the wider sense including both land and sea. However, the Homeric epics show no such distinction or strictness of use.⁴⁷ In some places, it was even difficult to show a distinction between the article and the demonstrative, which shared the same form ‘ \omicron , ‘ η , $\tau\acute{o}$.

In fact, ‘ \omicron , ‘ η , $\tau\acute{o}$ was an older and more ancient form of the demonstrative before it gradually lost its demonstrative force and became the common article, which was a later development.⁴⁸ In Homer, both uses are preserved side by side. Therefore, there have been attempts by scholars to ascertain the relative antiquity of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by statistical comparison between these two uses.⁴⁹ In *Shijing* scholarship, there is also a long-standing debate on whether the five poems in the *Shang Song* 《商颂》 were composed in the Shang Dynasty or in the later Song 宋 of the Chun Qiu 春秋 era.

⁴⁷ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 130-134.

⁴⁸ G.S. Kirk (1962) *The Songs of Homer*. Cambridge University Press. p. 209.

⁴⁹ See Scott (1911) “Two Linguistic Tests of the Relative Antiquity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*” *Classical Philology*. Vol. 6. No.2 (Apr. 1911) pp. 155-162. The general conclusion is that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* belong to the same era, but were composed much earlier than Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns.

Zhang (1995) insists that they are of Shang origin.⁵⁰ While Xiang (2002) argues that they are likely to be of Song origin.⁵¹ Again, Homeric scholarship can shed new light on an old *Shijing* problem.

The demonstrative 彼 in the *Shijing* shows similar qualities like the demonstrative ‘ο, ‘η, τό in the Homeric epics, in that it preserves both uses as a demonstrative such as in “彼作矣，文王康之”（《周颂·天作》）or in “彼有旨酒，又有佳殽”（《小雅·正月》）and its other use as an auxiliary particle without demonstrative force. In Homer, this auxiliary particle gradually loses its demonstrative force to become the common article, “a” or “the”. In the *Shijing*, however, 彼 takes the form of A 彼 BB, as in,

陟彼高冈，我马玄黄。（《周南·卷耳》）

瞻彼淇奥，绿竹猗猗。（《卫风·淇奥》）

相彼泉水，载清载浊。（《小雅·四月》）

挾彼殷武，奋伐荆楚。（《商颂·殷武》）

昔有成汤，自彼氐羌。（《商颂·殷武》）

陟彼景山，松柏丸丸。（《商颂·殷武》）

According to Xiang Xi, in all these cases above, the demonstrative force is very weak and 彼 acts merely as an auxiliary particle, or 衬字.⁵² If we statistically analyze the

⁵⁰ 张松如（1995）《商颂研究》天津：南开大学出版社。

⁵¹ 向熹（2002）《〈诗经〉语文论集》成都：四川民族出版社，30-35页。

⁵² 崔达送（2004）《诗经》中“彼”的语法语用功能考察，《古汉语研究》，2004年第1期，34页。

向熹（1987）《诗经语言研究》成都：四川人民出版社，296页。

distribution of the two uses, then it is evident that the *Shang Song* 《商颂》 should not be earlier than other poems in the *Shijing*, as neither use is significantly favoured over the other. Hence, we agree with Xiang (2002) that the *Shang Song* 《商颂》 should be of Song 宋 origin.

Summary

From the above comparison of the language of the *Shijing* and Homer, it is evident that the *Shijing* and Homer share a lot in common with one another. The simplicity and elasticity shown both the *Shijing* and Homer's traditional oral language signifies that they were both characteristic of a young speech still developing itself in the archaic age. Appraising the language of the *Shijing*'s from a traditional oral poetic perspective can also offer us a new angle to see the previously deemed chaotic and untidy forms such as variant *jiajie* 假借 words and confusing *xuci* 虚词 particles in a more objective critique as flexible and malleable elements of traditional oral poetry. Furthermore, if we can recognize the flexibility and malleability of the language of the *Shijing* as a form of traditional oral poetry which is also found in Homer, then we would not need to rely on the problematic definition of "epic" to base our comparison of the *Shijing* with Homer on. The flexible and coeval nature of the *Shijing*'s and Homer's oral traditional language already warrants an excellent and fascinating aspect for our comparison.

THREE

The *Shijing* 's Epic Structure

Repetition and Formulae

When reading the *Shijing* and Homer, it is not difficult to notice their repetitiveness.

There are always phrases or lines that repeat themselves once or several times elsewhere in the corpus. For example, consider poem 197 《小弁》 in the *Shijing*,

弁彼鶯斯、归飞提提。
民莫不谷、我独于罹。
何辜于天、我罪伊何。
心之忧矣、云如之何。
踟蹰周道、鞠为茂草。
我心忧伤、惄焉如捣。
假寐永叹、维忧用老。
心之忧矣、疢如疾首。
维桑与梓、必恭敬止。
靡瞻匪父、靡依匪母。
不属于毛、不离于褻。
天之生我、我辰安在。
菀彼柳斯、鸣蜩嘒嘒。
有漙者渊、萑苇淠淠。
譬彼舟流、不知所届。
心之忧矣、不遑假寐。
鹿斯之奔、维足伎伎。

雉之朝雊、尚求其雌。

譬彼坏木、疾用无枝。

心之忧矣、宁莫之知。

相彼投兔、尚或先之。

行有死人、尚或瑾之。

君子秉心、维其忍之。

心之忧矣、涕既陨之。

君子信谗、如或酬之。

君子不惠、不舒究之。

伐木掎矣、析薪杔矣。

舍彼有罪、予之佗矣。

莫高匪山、莫浚匪泉。

君子无易由言、耳属于垣。

无逝我梁、无发我笱。

我躬不阅、遑恤我后。

With flapping wings the crows ,

Come back , flying all in a flock .

Other people all are happy ,

And I only am full of misery .

What is my offence against Heaven ?

What is my crime ?

My heart is sad ; --

What is to be done ?

The way to Zhou should be level and easy ,

But it is all overgrown with rank grass .

My heart is wounded with sorrow ,

And I think till I feel as if pounded [all over] .

I lie down undressed , and sigh continually ;

Through my grief I am growing old .

My heart is sad ; --

It puts me in pain like a headache .

Even the mulberry trees and the Zi ,

Must be regarded with reverence :

But no one is to be looked up to like a father ;

No one is to be depended on like a mother .

Have I not a connection with the hairs [of my father] ?

Did I not dwell in the womb [of my mother] ?

O Heaven who gave me birth !

How was it at such an inauspicious time ?

Luxuriant grow those willows ,

And the cicadas [on them] go hui-hui .

Deep looks the pool ,

And abundantly grow the rushes and reeds [about it] ,

[But] I am like a boat adrift , --

Where it will go you know not .

My heart is sad ; --

I have not leisure to lie down [even] undressed .

The stag is running away ,

But his legs move slowly .

The pheasant crows in the morning ,

Seeking his mate .

I am like a ruined tree ,

Stript by disease of all its branches .

My heart is sad ; --

How is it that no one knows me ?

Look at the hare seeking protection ; --

Some one will step in before and save it .

One the road there is a dead man ;

Some one will bury him .

*[But] such is the heart of our sovereign ,
 That there is nothing he cannot bear to do .
 My heart is sad ,
 So that my tears are falling down .
 Our sovereign believes slanders ,
 As readily as he joins in the pledge cup .
 Our sovereign is unkind ,
 And does not leisurely examine into things .
 The tree-fellers follow the lean of the tree ;
 The faggot-cleavers follow the direction of the grain ;
 [But] he lets alone the guilty ,
 And imputes guilt to me .
 There is nothing higher than a mountain ;
 There is nothing deeper than a [great] spring .
 Our sovereign should not lightly utter his words ,
 Lest an ear be laid close to the wall .
 Do not approach my dam ;
 Do not remove my basket .
 My person is rejected ; --
 Of what use is it to care for what may come after?*

The phrase “心之忧矣” (*my heart is sad*) is repeated exactly five times in this poem.

Throughout the *Shijing*, this phrase also occurs elsewhere in eleven different poems.⁵³

Similarly in Homer, the phrase “ἄλγεα θυμῷ” (*the pains in my heart*) is also repeated at least ten times throughout both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁵⁴ Why is there so much repetitiveness present in the *Shijing* and Homeric poems?

⁵³ In poems 26, 27, 63, 109, 150, 183, 192, 197, 207, 233, 264, spanning the *Guo Feng*, *Xiao Ya* and *Da Ya* sections of the *Shijing*.

⁵⁴ In *Iliad* 9.321, 13.670, 16.55, 18.224, 18.397; *Odyssey* 12.427, 13.263, 14.310, 15.487, 17.13.

The repetition of phrases has long been observed and commented on by scholars in the Chinese and Western tradition for centuries. However, commentators did not recognize until recently that these repetitions were actually a poetic device of the ancient singer. It was not until the 1930s that Parry and Lord demonstrated with definitive evidence that these repetitions were in fact systematic formulae used by oral poets to compose their poetry.

In oral poetic performance, this kind of repetitive formulaic expression was an indispensable device for providing ready-made units for the oral poet's improvisation of poetry. Parry believed that,

*"the poet who habitually makes his poems without the aid of writing can do so only by putting together old verses and old parts of verses in an old way."*⁵⁵

Hence, the basic quality of early poetry, in Parry's words, was neither primitive nor heroic, but *oral* in nature, an oral language that is distinctively *formulaic and traditional*. This formulaic repetition, on the other hand, was also helpful for the audience to listen to the poem with greater ease and less exhaustion of the faculties. The repetition of formulae meant that both the ear and the mind slackened some of their effort, and the listener can be momentarily rested from the continuous attention paid to listening oral poetry.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Parry, Milman (1933) "Whole Formulaic Verses in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Poetry." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* LXIV: 181.

⁵⁶ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 88.

In the Homeric epics, this repetition is manifest to various degrees, from the smallest repetition of the epithet, such as “γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη” (*bright-eyed Athena*)⁵⁷ to the repetition of a line “ἥμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως” (*when early-born rosy-fingered Dawn appeared*)⁵⁸, to the repetition of a typical scene with a whole cluster of verses, such as,

“χέρνιβα δ' ἀμφίπολος προχόω ἐπέχευε φέρουσα
καλῇ χρυσεῖῃ ὑπὲρ ἀργυρέοιο λέβητος
νίψασθαι παρά δέ ξεστήν ἐτάνυσσε τράπεζαν
σῖτον δ' αἰδοίῃ ταμίῃ παρέθηκε φέρουσα
εἶδατα πόλλ' ἐπιθεῖσα χαριζομένη παρεόντων”

*(A maidservant brought water for them and poured it from a splendid and golden pitcher, holding it above a silver basin for them to wash, and she pulled a polished table before them. A grave housekeeper brought in the bread and served it to them, adding many good things to it, generous with her provisions.)*⁵⁹

This exact cluster of verses appears six times in the *Odyssey*, with different hosts, guests, and locales each time. This shows that formulaic repetition in Homer was not merely a static duplication, but dynamically and skilfully employed to suit different contexts and situations. As Lord summarizes, the ancient poet's art was, “*not so much in learning through repetition in the time-worn formulas as in the ability to compose and recompose*

⁵⁷ Repeated 85 times. Statistics from *The Chicago Homer Multilingual Database*.

⁵⁸ Repeated 22 times. *ibid*.

⁵⁹ Statistics from *The Chicago Homer Multilingual Database*.

the phrases for the idea of the moment on the pattern established by the basic formulas.”⁶⁰

Formulaic Structure

Forty years after Parry and Lord’s groundbreaking analysis, C.H. Wang in his 1974 doctoral dissertation also demonstrated that the *Shijing* was composed of oral formulae and formulaic expressions just like Homeric poetry. As in Homer, repetition in the *Shijing* is manifest to various degrees. For example, the epithet “赫赫” (*awe-inspiring*) is repeated six times with three different people.⁶¹ The line “王事靡盬” (*there is no end to the king’s business*) is repeated twelve times in both the *Guo Feng* 国风 and *Xiao Ya* 小雅 sections.⁶² The typical scene, “毋逝我梁，毋发我笱。我躬不阅，遑恤我后？” with its whole cluster of verses, is repeated twice in poems 35 《谷风》 and 197 《小弁》，

Just like in the Homeric epics, these formulaic repetitions were modified and employed to suit different contexts and situations. For example, the line 载驰载驱 may be repeated as a whole-verse formula, as in poems 54 and 163. But at the same time, it may also be flexibly modified to give the following formulaic expression,

⁶⁰ Lord, Albert B. (1960) *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p.5.

⁶¹ 赫赫南仲 repeated 3 times in poem 168; 赫赫师尹 repeated twice in poem 191; 赫赫姜嫄 in poem 300.

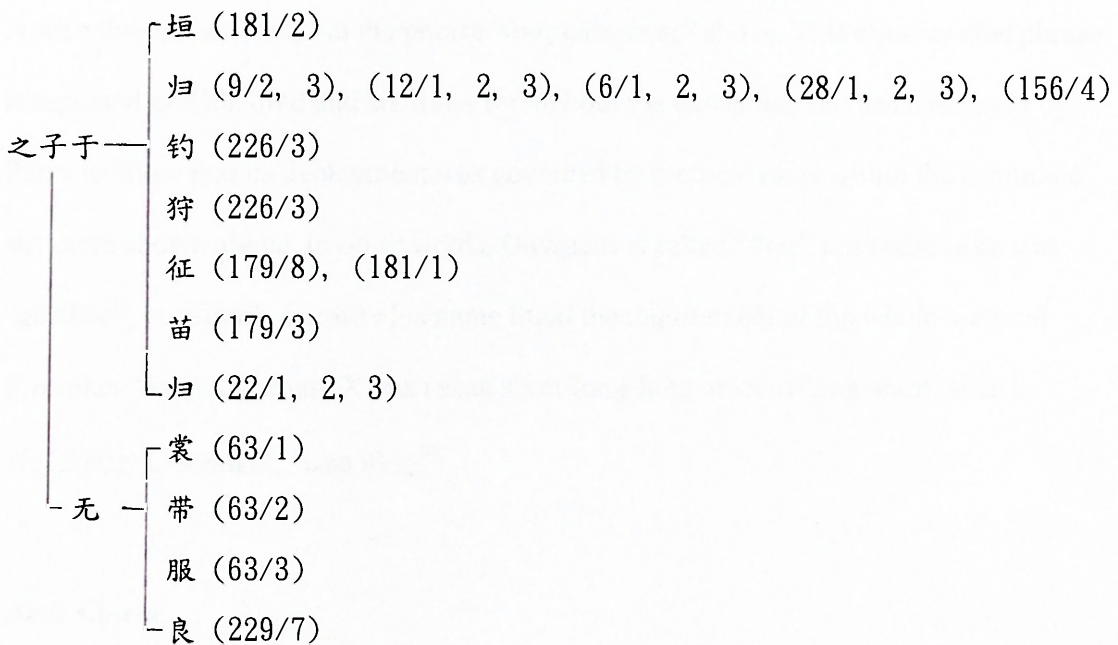
⁶² Repeated 4 times in poem 162; 3 times in poem 121 and poem 169; once in poem 167 and poem 205.

载	号	载	奴 (220/4)
	渴		饥 (167/6)
	起		行 (183/3)
	饥		渴 (167/2)
	玄		黄 (154/3)
	驂		駟 (222/2)
	芟		柞 (290/1)
	脂		牽 (39/3)
	色		笑 (299/3)
	寢		兴 (128/3)
	震		夙 (245/1)
	生		育 (245/1)
	驰		驱 (54/1), (163/2, 3, 4, 5)
	燔		烈 (245/7)
	谋		惟 (245/7)
	飞		下 (162/3)
	飞		止 (183/1), (162/4)
	飞		鸣 (196/4)
	飞		扬 (183/2)

Here the formula pattern 载 A 载 B is only partially repeated, altering one or two words each time to suit different contexts.

Another example of this oral flexibility can be seen in the formulae 之子于归, which is repeated twelve times as a whole-verse formulae. But upon closer inspection it actually belongs to a larger formulaic structure shown below:⁶³

⁶³ Notation following C.H. Wang (1974) *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 51-53, where the first number is the traditional number assigned to the poem and the second number(s) denoting the stanza(s) of the poem.



Comparing this with the Homeric case, where the noun-epithet formulae of the speaker and gender of the person addressed were altered to suit different contexts, then the striking similarities between the *Shijing* and Homeric formulae are manifest.

Both works were composed by means of an oral formulaic technique characteristic of early oral poetry.

y	x
τον (him)	πολυτλας διος Οδυσσευς (long-suffering godlike Odysseus)
την (her)	διος θυγατηρ Αφροδιτη (the daughter of Zeus Aphrodite)
δ ημειβετ επειτα (and x replied y)	θεα λευκωλενος Ηρη (the goddess white-armed Hera)
	αναξ ανδρων Αγαμεμνων (the lord of men Agamemnon)
	μεγας Τελαμωνιος Αιας (the huge Telamonian Ajax)

Notice the epithet “*δῖος*” in the phrase “*δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς*” above. This noun-epithet phrase is repeated one hundred and six times throughout the two epics, and has been used by Parry to show that its deployment was governed by metrical rules within the formulaic structure shown above. In other words, Odysseus is called “*δῖος*” not because he was “*godlike*”, but simply because his name fitted the requirement of the whole metrical formulae “*δῖος-X*”, where X must scan short-long-long or short-long-short, such as Ἀχιλλεύς, Ὀδυσσεύς, ὑφορβός.⁶⁴

Artis Causa

In recent years, however, there has been increasing criticism of this structural analysis which reduces every Homeric line to a *metri causa* and mechanical interpretation. Foley (1999) contends that “*δῖος*”, while indispensable in completing the meter, was also part of a larger oral poetic tradition, a traditional sign or “*σημα*”, which points to the totality of the phrase *within* the traditional context. In this context, where the poet and his audience are both familiar with the Homeric register, “*δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς*” becomes an artistic unit of utterance, or one whole Homeric ‘*word*’ instead of two separate Greek words. This composite Homeric ‘*word*’, Foley argues, was an integral sign that drew upon the deeper resources of the ambient poetic tradition. Hence, “*δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς*” must be understood as a whole, as it signifies not just one quality of “*godlike*”, but *a range* of characteristics that the Homeric tradition assigns to Odysseus that makes him godlike. It is the whole ambient poetic tradition *behind* the word “*δῖος*” that resonates with the

⁶⁴ M. Parry (1987) *The Making of Homeric Verse: the collected papers of Milman Parry*. (Ed. Adam Parry). New York: Oxford University Press. p. 10.

audience. Hence, “δῖος” by itself would be difficult to translate and sometimes better left untranslated, instead of accepting a superficial lexical translation.⁶⁵

Another good example would be “χλωρον δεος”, or “green fear”, which occurs nine times throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Each time this phrase fills out either the last two or three cola in the hexameter line. Therefore Parry would have argued that the word “green” was *metri causa*, or for the sake of completing the meter. However, is the word “green” simply for the sake of completing the meter? Or were there other artistic reasons for choosing the word “green”?

Upon closer inspection, it turns out that eight times out of these nine occurrences, “χλωρον δεος” describes a situation where supernaturally inspired fear takes hold of a person or a group of people. For example, in *Iliad* H 479 when the Achaians and Trojans feast, Zeus devising evil things for both parties, thunders terribly all night long; or in *Iliad* Θ 77 when Zeus sends a bad omen to the Achaians the next day; or in *Odyssey* λ 43, Odysseus is seized by green fear as the shades gather to drink the blood of the sacrificed sheep; or in *Odyssey* μ 243 when Odysseus and his companions confront the sea-monster Charybdis. Therefore, “χλωρον δεος” are not *two* words signifying “fear” that is “green”, but *one* traditional “word” or unit of utterance in the Homeric register. It is a traditional *σημα* (sign) specially coded for superhuman and unconquerable forces beyond mortal

⁶⁵ J. M. Foley (1999) *Homer's Traditional Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. pp. 213-216.

control. Should this “*fear*” be merely translated as the colour “*green*”, then much of its traditional referentiality would have been lost.⁶⁶

A similar case in the *Shijing* where traditional referentiality is important would be the so-called *citou* 词头 epithet 有.

For example,

有齐季女。（《召南·采芣》）

投畀有北！有北不受，投畀有昊！（《小雅·巷伯》）

有周不显；有商孙子。（《大雅·文王》）

天监有周。（《大雅·烝民》）

实右序有周；明昭有周。（《周颂·清迈》）

有娥方将。（《商颂·长发》）

In all these cases above, 有 acts as a *citou* 词头 for 商、周、and 娥, which is very much like the epithets in Homer. Like “*δῖος*” or “*χλωρον*”, the *citou* 有 cannot be translated literally as “*have*” and is often left untranslated. Most Chinese scholars believe that 有商、有周、有娥 are no different from 商、周、and 娥. As the illustrious Qing scholar Wang Yinzhi (王引之) explained, “The presence of these *citou* was simply to complete the noun” (有，语助也，一字不成词，则加有字以配之，若虞、夏、殷、周皆国名

⁶⁶ J. M. Foley (1999) *Homer's Traditional Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. pp. 216-217.

而曰有虞、有夏、有殷、有周是也。)⁶⁷ Yang (1981) also holds a similar view, but explains from a metrical perspective, “‘有’作词头，无意义，只是凑成一个节拍”⁶⁸.

Inspired by Foley, we put forward a third explanation here. The use of 有, should not only be *metri causa* (for the sake of completing the meter), but also *artis causa* (for the sake of art), with 有商、有周、有娥 being integral of a larger traditional *σημα* (sign) that points to an ambient traditional poetic context. This larger ‘word’, with 有 attached in front of the tribe’s name, idiomatically expresses the unstated implications of the glory of 有商、有周、有娥 which include *a range of qualities* the poetic tradition attributed to these tribes. Hence, we argue that 有商、有周、有娥 are indeed different from 商、周、娥.

The evidence for this can be shown by the phrase 实右序有周 in poem 273 《时迈》. Instead of the standard tetrameter, this verse has five characters. If the epithet 有 was for the sake of completing the meter, then there should be no need to complete the meter here. In fact, it disrupts the standard tetrameter. Hence, there must be some other reason besides *metri causa* for including the epithet 有 here. Therefore we contend that the use of the epithet 有 was not only for the sake of the metre, but also for the sake of art, or *artis causa*. The reason why 实右序有周 is metrically warranted, is because 有周 should

⁶⁷ 王引之 (1766-1834) 《经传释词》上海：中华书局 (1932). 72 页.

⁶⁸ 杨伯峻 (1981) 《古汉语虚词》北京：中华书局. 291-295 页.

be read as one ‘word’, instead of two, therefore giving the standard tetrameter 实右序[有周], where [有周] is seen as one poetic unit. Or in Foley’s words, one idiomatic “word” that serves as a traditional *σημα* (sign) pointing to the ambient traditional poetic context in the *Shijing* register.

Comparing all instances of 周 and 有周, it is clear that 有周 was used when the poetic context was related to heaven and religious worship. For example, in poem 15, “谁其尸之，有齐季女。”（《召南·采芣》），the word 尸 signifies that the girl from Qi (有齐季女) was responsible for performing some sacrificial rite.

In poem 235, “文王在上，於昭于天，周虽旧邦，其命维新，有周不显，帝命不时…假哉天命，有商孙子。”（《大雅·文王》），according to the *Mao Preface*, this poem is about King Wen receiving Heaven’s mandate, as is seen by the numerous references to *tian* 天 in the poem.⁶⁹

This is further confirmed in poem 260, “天监有周。”（《大雅·烝民》），and poem 273, “昊天其子之，实右序有周。”（《大雅·时迈》），where the Zhou kingdom is explicitly said to be “*looked after*” by Heaven and blessed by the God 昊天.

⁶⁹ 《毛诗序》：“《文王》，文王受命作周也。”《笺》：“受天命而王天下，制立周邦。”

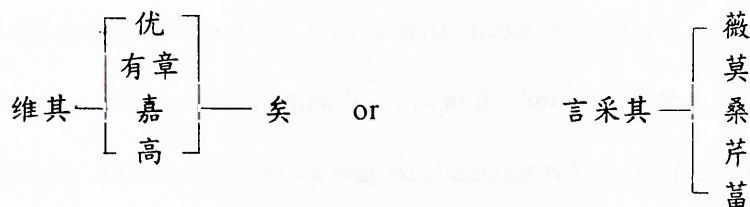
Again, in poem 304, “有娥方将，帝立子生商。”（《商颂·长发》），帝 is the God of Shang. According to the *Mao Preface*, this poem is also about sacrificial worship.⁷⁰ Hence, from all the cases above, it is clear that 有周 was a traditional σημα (sign) used when the poem was divinity-related.

The difference between 周 and 有周 is subtle and requires an appreciation of 有周 as a traditional sign that points to the ambient poetic tradition of the *Shijing* register. Any attempt to isolate 有 from 周 deprives the expression 有周 of its traditional implications, as 有 by itself, just like “*διος*”, or “*χλωρον δεος*”, cannot be understood on a literal level, but belonged to a larger traditional σημα (sign). Hence, although early oral poetry was formulaic, it was by no means mechanical and wholly *metri causa*, but also *artis causa*.

The Role of Xuci Particles

In a recent paper by Sun (2006), the use of *xuci* 虚词 particles in the *Shijing* has also been explained from an *artis causa* perspective. Sun argues that the use of *xuci* 虚词 in the *Shijing* is not wholly due to *metri causa*, but more so because of its unique role in serving as traditional σηματα (signs) that draw upon a larger ambient poetic tradition. He points out that almost all formulaic patterns in the *Shijing* use *xuci* 虚词 as structural elements to compose the poetic line. For example,

⁷⁰ 《毛诗序》：“《长发》，大禘也。”《笺》：“大禘，郊祭天也。”



The main difference between the later Wei-Jin 魏晋 tetrameter verses from the original *Shijing* tetrameter verses is that the use of *xuci* gradually declines. For example, in a famous poem written in tetrameter verse by 嵇康 (223–262 A. D.), 《赠秀才入军》, he uses almost no *xuci* at all, even though the metre entirely fits the tetrameter verse,

息徒兰圃，秣马华山。

流磻平皋，垂纶长川。

目送归鸿，手挥五弦。

俯仰自得，游心太虚。

嘉彼钓叟，得鱼忘筌。

郢人逝矣，谁与尽言？

Sun explains that this is because by the time of the Wei-Jin 魏晋, the *Shijing* oral poetic tradition had already been lost. Hence, the technique of using *xuci* as traditional oral constituents 虚字结构 in the *Shijing*'s formulaic structure also faded away.⁷¹ The metre remained, but the *xuci* were gone.

⁷¹ 孙立尧 (2006) “四言诗虚字中心说” *中国韵文学刊*. 第20卷. 第4期. 25–36页.

This explanation sees the *xuci* 虚词 particles in a fresh new light, as constituents of a traditional oral formulaic pattern *artis causa*, instead of merely metrical units called in to complete the line mechanically. *xuci* in the *Shijing* context, points to a larger ambient poetic tradition, or a unique way of speaking within the traditional *Shijing* register. Again, this is an excellent example of how current research from Homeric studies can offer new and exciting perspectives on *Shijing* scholarship.

Summary

Based on our above analysis of the *Shijing* and Homer's oral formulaic structure, it is evident that within the Chinese poetic tradition, only the *Shijing* qualifies as poetry characteristic of an oral poetic tradition. The *Chu Ci* 《楚辞》, another close contender of China's epic, falls short of a structural repetitive formulae and a flexible oral formulaic structure. Hence, we contend that the *Shijing*, in terms of its traditional oral poetic structure, is the closest equivalent to the Homeric epics.

FOUR

The *Shijing*'s Epic Content

Archaic Content

Both the *Shijing* and Homer have traditionally been regarded as encyclopaedias because their content is so wide-ranging that almost every aspect of early archaic society can be found depicted in the poems. For example, poems about love, courtship, marriage, agriculture, sacrifices, war, politics, religion and philosophy can all be found in the *Shijing*.⁷² Likewise, the Homeric epics also comprise a pantheon of gods, mythology, war and glory, love and marriage, wisdom and philosophy. But most interestingly is that, both oral poetic traditions, being so far separated from each other geographically, show a multitude of similarities.

When reading the *Shijing* and Homer, it is not surprising to notice the multitude of similarities that both texts share in terms of content. For example, the detailed depiction of sacrificial rites, the recurring themes of war and honour, and an abundance of plant and animal descriptions. This can be explained by the fact that both the *Shijing* and Homer were composed in the same historical period around the 10th or 8th century B.C.⁷³, which was a period before writing was invented, and Greek and Chinese civilization were still in their early stages. Therefore, a lot of commonalities can be found in both oral traditions reflecting the early archaic nature of Chinese and Greek culture and society.

⁷² 周锡馥 (1998) 《诗经选》三联书店 (香港) 4-5 页.

⁷³ The *Shijing* is commonly dated from the Zhou Dynasty (1027-771 BC) to the Spring & Autumn Period (770-476 BC). Whereas the Iliad and Odyssey are dated to the 8th or 7th century B.C.

Sacrificial Rites

Both the *Shijing* and Homer devote many lines of poetry to detailed description of sacrificial rites to the gods. For example, in poem 210 《信南山》, the scene of winter sacrifice⁷⁴ is outlined as follows,

信彼南山，維禹甸之。
畇畇原隰，曾孫田之。
我疆我理，南東其畝。
上天同雲，雨雪雰雰。
益之以霡霂，既優既渥，
既霑既足，生我百穀。
疆場翼翼，黍稷彧彧。
曾孫之穡，以為酒食。
畀我尸賓，壽考萬年！
中田有廬，疆場有瓜。
是剝是蒞，獻之皇祖。
曾孫壽考，受天之祜！
祭以清酒，從以騂牡，
享于祖考：執其鸞刀，
以啟其毛，取其血膋。
是烝是享，苾苾芬芬，
祀事孔明。先祖是皇：
報以介福，萬壽無疆！

⁷⁴ 方玉潤《詩經原始》《信南山》，王者烝祭也。

*(Yes, [all about] that southern hill,
Was made manageable by Yu.
Its plains and marshes being opened up,
It was made into fields by the distant descendant.
We define their boundaries, we form their smaller divisions,
And make the acres lie, here to the south, there to the east.
The heavens over head are one arch of clouds,
Snowing in multitudinous flakes .
There is superadded the drizzling rain.
When [the land] has received the moistening,
Soaking influence abundantly,
It produces all our kinds of grain.
The boundaries and smaller divisions are nicely adjusted,
And the millets yield abundant crops,
The harvest of the distant descendant.
We proceed to make there with spirits and food,
To supply our representatives of the dead , and our guests; --
To obtain long life, extending over myriads of years.
In the midst of the fields are the huts,
And along the bounding divisions are gourds.
The fruits is sliced and pickled,
To be presented to our great ancestors,
That their distant descendant may have long life,
And receive the blessing of Heaven.
We sacrifice [first] with pure spirits,
And then follow with a red bull;
Offering them to our ancestors.
[Our lord] holds the knife with tinkling bells,
To lay open the hair of the victim,
And takes its flesh and fat.*

*Then we present, then we offer;
All round the fragrance is diffused.
Complete and brilliant is the sacrificial service;
Grandly come our ancestors.
They will reward [their descendant] with great blessing, --
Long life, years without end.⁷⁵)*

In this poem, we can observe several aspects of sacrificial worship in early Zhou society. For example, the use of “*clear spirits*” (祭以清酒), the sacrifice of the “*red bull*” (騂牡), the detailed description of the “*knife with tinkling bells*” (執其鸞刀) and the course of the slaughter (*lay open the hair of the victim, and take its flesh and fat*. 以啟其毛，取其血膋), ending with the diffusion of the fragrance of roasted meat (是烝是享，苾苾芬芬).

Comparing this with a sacrificial scene in the *Odyssey* γ 447-463,

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' εὖξαντο καὶ οὐλοχύτας προβάλοντο
αὐτίκα Νέστορος υἱὸς ὑπέρθυμος Θρασυμήδης
ἤλασεν ἄγχι στάς πέλεκυς δ' ἀπέκοψε τένοντας
αὐχενίους λῦσεν δέ βοός μένος αἰ δ' ὀλόλυξαν
θυγατέρες τε νυοί τε καὶ αἰδοίη παράκοιτις
Νέστορος Εὐρυδίκη πρέσβα Κλυμένοιο θυγατρῶν
οἱ μὲν ἔπειτ' ἀνελόντες ἀπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης
ἔσχον ἀτὰρ σφάξεν Πεισίστρατος ὄρχαμος ἀνδρῶν
τῆς δ' ἐπεὶ ἐκ μέλαν αἶμα ῥύη λίπε δ' ὀστέα θυμός
αἶψ' ἄρα μὲν διέχευαν ἄφαρ δ' ἐκ μηρία τάμνον
πάντα κατὰ μοῖραν κατὰ τε κνίσῃ ἐκάλυψαν

⁷⁵ The translations I use in this essay are from James Legge's *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. IV, (Rpt. Hong Kong, 1939).

δίπτυχα ποιήσαντες ἐπ' αὐτῶν δ' ὠμοθέτησαν
καῖε δ' ἐπὶ σχίζῃς γέρων ἐπὶ δ' αἶθοπα οἶνον
λεῖβε νέοι δέ παρ' αὐτόν ἔχον πεμπώβολα χερσίν
αὐτάρ ἐπεὶ κατὰ μῆρ' ἐκάη καὶ σπλάγχχν' ἐπάσαντο
μίστυλλον τ' ἄρα τ' ἄλλα καὶ ἀμφ' ὀβελοῖσιν ἔπειραν
ὥπτων δ' ἀκροπόρους ὀβελούς ἐν χερσίν ἔχοντες.

*(Now when all had made prayer and flung down the scattering barley,
Thrasymedes, the high-hearted son of Nestor, standing
close up, struck, and the ax chopped its way through the tendons
of the neck and unstrung the strength of the cow, and now the daughters
and daughters-in-law of Nestor and his grave wife Eurydike,
eldest of the daughters of Klymenos, raised the outcry.
They lifted the cow from earth of the wide ways, and held her
fast in place, and Peisistratos, leader of men, slaughtered her.
Now when the black blood had run out, and the spirit went from
the bones, they divided her into parts, and cut out the thigh bones
all according to due order, and wrapped them in fat,
making a double fold, and laid shreds of flesh upon them.
The old man burned these on cleft sticks and poured the gleaming
wine over, while the young men with forks in their hands stood about him.
But when they had burned the thigh pieces and tasted the vitals,
they cut all the remainder into pieces and spitted them,
and roasted all carefully and took off the pieces.)⁷⁶*

⁷⁶ The translations I use in this essay are from Richmond Lattimore's *Iliad and Odyssey*. Lattimore, Richmond (1951) *The Iliad of Homer*. University of Chicago Press. Lattimore, Richmond (1967) *The Odyssey of Homer*. Harper & Row Publishers Inc.

The similarities between the two passages are manifest. Both used cattle for sacrifice, both described in detail the course of slaughter and both involved the pouring of wine and the roasting of meat. In the above passage a βοός (cow) was used, while a 牝 (bull) was used in the *Shijing*. However, there are also many cases where the bull was used for sacrifice in Homer⁷⁷, especially in hecatombs. For example, in the *Iliad* A 315-316,

ἔρδον δ' Απόλλωνι τεληέσσας ἑκατόμβας
ταύρων δ' αἰγῶν παρὰ θῖν' ἄλός ἀτρυγέτιοι

*(Then they accomplished perfect hecatombs to Apollo,
of bulls and goats along the beach of the barren salt sea.)*

Here, Homer describes the use of both ταύρων δ' αἰγῶν (bulls and goats) for the sacrifice of the hecatomb. Compare this with the *Shijing* poem 209 《楚茨》,

絜爾牛羊，以往烝嘗。

*(The oxen and sheep all pure ,
We proceed to the winter and autumnal sacrifices .)*

where both 牛羊 (oxen and sheep, without specifying sex) were also used for the 烝嘗 (winter and autumnal sacrifice).

In fact, not only is the sacrificial animal the same, but the description for the sacrificial cattle is also the same. For example, in the *Odyssey* μ 353-365,

⁷⁷ For example see also *Iliad* B 402 “But Agamemnon the lord of men dedicated a fat ox five years old to Zeus, all-powerful son of Kronos,” and 410 “They stood in a circle about the ox and took up the scattering barley; and among them powerful Agamemnon spoke in prayer”

αὐτίκα δ' Ἡελίοιο βοῶν ἐλάσαντες ἀρίστας

ἐγγύθεν οὐ γάρ τῆλε νεός κυανοπρώροιο

βοσκέσκονθ' ἑλίκες καλαί βόες εὐρυμέτωποι

...

αὐτάρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' εὐξάντο καὶ ἔσφαξαν καὶ ἔδειραν

(They at once drove off the best of the cattle of the sun

from nearby, for not far from our dark-prowed ship

*the fine broad-browed **curved-horned cattle** were grazing.*

*... Then after they prayed, they **slaughtered and skinned them**)*

The cattle in Homer are described as ἑλίκες βόες (*curved-horned cattle*). Whereas in

Shijing poem 291 《良耜》, the bull is described as 有掾其角 (*with crooked horns*).

殺時惇牡，有掾其角。

([Now] we kill this black-muzzled tawny bull,

With his crooked horns)

However, the most striking resemblance between sacrifice in Homer and the *Shijing* is

the attention paid to details in describing the violent procedure of the slaughter. For

example, in the above poem 210 《信南山》 the slaughter is described as,

以啟其毛，取其血膋

(to lay open the hair of the victim, and take its flesh and fat).

In poem 209 《楚茨》，the skinning of the animals and the arrangement of meat is also

depicted in gory detail,

絜爾牛羊，以往烝嘗。
或剝或亨，或肆或將。

*The oxen and sheep all pure ,
We proceed to the winter and autumnal sacrifices .
Some skin [the victims] ; some boil [their flesh] ;
Some arrange [the meat] ; some adjust [the pieces of it] .*

Compare this with the *Iliad*, A 459-461, where the skinning of the animal and the arrangement of meat, such as laying shreds of flesh upon the fat, is also described in detail,

αὔερυσαν μὲν πρῶτα καὶ ἔσφαζαν καὶ ἔδειραν
μηρούς τ' ἐξέταμον κατὰ τε κνίση ἐκάλυσαν
δίπτυχα ποιήσαντες ἐπ' αὐτῶν δ' ὠμοθέτησαν

*(first they drew back the victims' heads and slaughtered them and skinned them,
and cut away the meat from the thighs and wrapped them in fat,
making a double fold, and laid shreds of flesh upon them.)*

Given the nature of the *Shijing* to be elliptical when describing violence⁷⁸, it is unusual that the details of the course of sacrificial slaughter should be described with such gory detail. This may only be explained by the notion that violence contained within ritual is considered to be acceptable, as has been discussed in Homeric sacrifice.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ C.H. Wang (1988) *From Ritual to Allegory : Seven essays in early Chinese poetry*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press. pp. 61-70.

⁷⁹ Richard Seaford (1989) "Homeric and Tragic Sacrifice" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-), Vol. 119, p. 89.

Another aspect that both the *Shijing* and Homer share is the use of wine for sacrifice. For example, in poem 239 《早麓》，清酒 (*clear spirits*) were prepared for the sacrifice.

清酒既載，騂牡既備。

以享以祀，以介景福。

(His clear spirits are in vessel ;

His red bull is ready ; --

To offer, to sacrifice ,

To increase his bright happiness.)

Compare this with the *Odyssey* γ 459-460, which also describes the pouring of αἶθοπα

οἶνον (*gleaming wine*) onto the roasting meat on cleft sticks,

καῖε δ' ἐπὶ σχίζῃς γέρων ἐπὶ δ' αἶθοπα οἶνον
λεῖβε νέοι δέ παρ' αὐτόν ἔχον πεμπώβολα χερσίν.

(The old man burned these on cleft sticks and poured the gleaming

wine over, while the young men with forks in their hands stood about him.)

Again, sacrificial roasting of meat is observed in both the *Shijing* and Homer. For example, in poem 245 《生民》，

誕我祀如何？

或舂或揄，或簸或蹂。

釋之叟叟，烝之浮浮。

載謀載惟：取蕭祭脂。

取羝以軋。載燔載烈。以興嗣歲。

卬盛于豆，于豆于登。

其香始升，上帝居歆。胡臭亶時！

(And how as to our sacrifices [to him])?

Some hull [the grain]; some take it from the mortar;

Some sift it ; some tread it.

It is rattling in the dishes;

It is distilled, and the steam floats about.

We consult; we observe the rites of purification;

We take southernwood and offer it with the fat;

We sacrifice a ram to the Spirit of the path;

We offer roast flesh and broiled: —

And thus introduce the coming year .

We load the stands with the offerings,

The stands both of wood and of earthenware .

As soon as the fragrance ascends,

God , well pleased , smells the sweet savour.

Fragrant is it, and in its due season!)

Notice that both traditions include the use of grain for invocation in sacrifice. For

example, in the above poem, 或舂或揄，或簸或蹂。釋之叟叟，烝之浮浮。

*(Some hull [the **grain**]; some take it from the mortar; Some sift it; some tread it.*

It is rattling in the dishes; It is distilled, and the steam floats about.)

In the *Shijing*, the grain commonly used for sacrifice was millet, as is attested in poem

209 《楚茨》，

楚楚者茨、言抽其棘。
自昔何為、我藝黍稷。
我黍與與、我稷翼翼。
我倉既盈、我庾維億。
以為酒食、以饗以祀。

*(Thick grew the tribulus [on the ground] ,
But they cleared away its thorny bushes .
Why did they this of old ?
That we might plant our millet and sacrificial millet;
That our millet might be abundant ,
And our sacrificial millet luxuriant .
When our barns are full ,
And our stacks can be counted by tens of myriads ,
We proceed to make spirits and prepare viands ,
For offerings and sacrifice.)*

Whereas in Homer, the grain used for sacrifice is always barley,

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' εὐξάντο καὶ οὐλοχύτας προβάλοντο.

(Now when all had made prayer and flung down the scattering barley)

This phrase is repeated thrice as a whole-verse formula throughout the Homeric epics every time before an animal was sacrificed.⁸⁰ And every time the grain used was barley, only except in *Odyssey* μ, when there was no barley available nearby.

⁸⁰ In *Iliad* A 458, *Iliad* B 421 and *Odyssey* γ 447.

Another interesting similarity between Zhou sacrifice and Homeric sacrifice is the offering of fat to the gods. For example, in the above *Shijing* poem, it is described,

取蕭祭脂。取羝以較。

載燔載烈。以興嗣歲。

(We take southernwood and offer it with the fat;

We sacrifice a ram to the Spirit of the path;

We offer roast flesh and broiled: --

'And thus introduce the coming year.)

Whereas in Homer, fat was customarily used to wrap meat and consecrate to the gods, as in *Iliad* A 460-461,

μηρούς τ' ἐξέταμον κατά τε κνίσῃ ἐκάλυψαν

δίπτυχα ποιήσαντες ἐπ' αὐτῶν δ' ὠμοθέτησαν

*(and cut away the meat from the thighs and wrapped them in fat,
making a double fold, and laid shreds of flesh upon them.)*

When the whole sacrifice comes to completion, the poem usually ends with the fragrance of roasted meat ascending to heaven, as in *Shijing* poem 245 《生民》

其香始升，上帝居歆。胡臭亶時！

(As soon as the fragrance ascends,

God, well pleased, smells the sweet savour.

Fragrant is it, and in its due season!)

And in poem 209 《楚茨》,

苾芬孝祀，神嗜飲食。

*(Fragrant has been your filial sacrifice,
And the Spirits have enjoyed your spirits and viands.)*

Or in poem 210 《信南山》,

是烝是享，苾苾芬芬。

*(Then we present, then we offer;
All round the fragrance is diffused.)*

Whereas in the *Iliad* A 317,

κνίση δ' οὐρανὸν ἵκεν ἑλισσομένη περί καπνῶ.

(The savour of the burning swept in circles up to the bright sky.)

Hence, from beginning to end, the similarities between Zhou sacrifice and Homeric sacrifice are manifest. Starting from the use of grain, to the skinning and slaughter of the animal, to the burning of fat, the pouring of wine, and ending with the fragrance of roast meat rising up to the sky, both traditions show an unusual coincidence of similarities with respect to sacrifice. This can only be explained by the fact that this kind of sacrificial content is characteristic of an archaic age when early Greek and Chinese society were still in a very early stage in their civilization.⁸¹ Being both passed down from an oral tradition, the *Shijing* and Homeric poems were thus able to keep record of these far-distant memories of early Greek and Chinese civilization.

⁸¹ R.K. Yerkes (1953) *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and early Judaism*. New York: Scribner. pp. 8-68.

傅亚庶 (2005) 《中国上古祭祀文化》 第二版. 北京市: 高等教育出版社. 303-317 页.

War, Honour and Glory

Another important aspect which the *Shijing* and Homer both share in terms of content is war. In early society, war was a major part of life. The ability to defend your people was a glorious virtue praised in both the Homeric and *Shijing* traditions, as is described in poem 285 《武》 ,

于皇武王、无竞维烈。
允文文王、克开厥后。
嗣武受之、胜殷遏刘、耆定尔功。

*Oh ! great wast thou , O king Wu ,
Displaying the utmost strength in thy work .
Truly accomplished was king Wen ,
Opening the path for his successors .
Thou did'st receive the inheritance from him ;
Thou did'st vanquish Yin , and put a stop to its cruelties ; --
Effecting the firm establishment of thy merit .*

The accomplishment of King Wu's *vanquishing of Yin and putting a stop to its cruelties* (胜殷遏刘) is praised as *opening the path for his descendants* (克开厥后). This association of martial valor (武功) with the forthcoming prosperity of descendants is also described in poem 282 《雝》 ,

有来雝雝、至止肃肃。
相维辟公、天子穆穆。

于荐广牡、相予肆祀。

假哉皇考、绥予孝子。

宣哲维人、文武维后。

燕及皇天、克昌厥后。

绥我眉寿、介以繁祉。

既友烈考、亦友文母。

They come full of harmony ;

They are here , in all gravity ; --

The princess assisting ,

While the Son of Heaven looks profound .

'While I present [this] noble bull ,

And they assist me in setting forth the sacrifice ,

O great and august Father ,

Comfort me , your filial Son !

'With penetrating wisdom thou did'st play the man ,

A sovereign with the gifts both of peace and war ,

Giving rest even to great Heaven ,

And ensuring prosperity to thy descendants .

'Thou comfortest me with the eyebrows of longevity ;

Thou makest me great with manifold blessings .

I offer this sacrifice to my meritorious father ,

And to my accomplished mother . '

Here, the phrase 克昌厥后 (*ensuring prosperity to thy descendants*) closely follows

文武维后 (*a sovereign with the gifts both of peace and war*), suggesting that martial

valor was a necessary prerequisite for the prosperity of one's descendants. Compare this with the *Odyssey* ω 30-33,

ὥς ὄφελες τιμῆς ἀπονήμενος ἥς περ ἄνασσεσ
δήμῳ ἔνι Τρώων θάνατον καί πότμον ἐπισπεῖν
τῷ κεν τοί τύμβον μὲν ἐποίησαν Παναχαιοί
ἡδέ κε καί σῳ παιδί μέγα κλέος ἦρα' ὀπίσσω

*(How I wish that, enjoying that high place of your power,
you could have met death and destiny in the land of the Trojans.
So all the Achaeans would have made a mound to cover you,
and you would have won great glory for your son hereafter.)*

In this passage, Achilles exclaims that the greatest glory for Agamemnon would be to die fighting in Troy and therefore *win great glory for his son thereafter* (σῳ παιδί μέγα κλέος ἦρα' ὀπίσσω). Hence, we can see in both the *Shijing* and Homer, war was not only for the sake of one's own survival, but also for one's descendants' survival, prosperity and glory. This is further attested in *Shijing* poem 294 《桓》,

绥万邦、嫔丰年。

天命匪解。

桓桓武王、保有厥士。

于以四方、克定厥家。

于昭于天。皇以间之。

*There is peace throughout our myriad regions;
There has been a succession of plentiful years : --
Heaven does not weary in its favour .
The martial king Wu ,
Maintained [the confidence of] his officers ,*

*And employed them all over the kingdom ,
So securing the establishment of his Family .
Oh ! glorious was he in the sight of Heaven ,
Which kinged him in the room [of Shang] .*

Here, King Wu is praised for his ability to *maintain his officers* (保有厥士) and *secure the establishment of his family* (克定厥家). Therefore his glory and fame goes up to the sky (于昭于天). In the *Iliad* ① 192, Nestor is also described as,

Νεστορέην τῆς νῦν κλέος οὐρανόν ἵκει
(*Nestor, whose high fame goes up to the sky now*)

It is interesting to note that both the *Shijing* and Homer describe fame and glory as reaching the sky. In fact, fame and good reputation are common themes found in both the *Shijing* and Homer. The expression 德音 recurs in eleven poems referring one's reputation.⁸² For example, in poem 161 鹿鸣, the host praises his guests' great reputation,

我有嘉宾，德音孔昭。

(*I have here admirable guests ;
Whose virtuous fame is grandly brilliant.*)

In poem 278 振鹭, the guests' reputation is described as lasting forever (以永终誉).

⁸² In poems 29 《日月》，35 《谷风》，83 《有女同车》，128 《小戎》，160 《狼跋》，161 《鹿鸣》，172 《南山有台》，218 《車牽》，228 《隰桑》，241 《皇矣》，249 《假乐》. Besides 德音, 誉 and 令闻 are also common terms for reputation, recurring six times and three times in the *Shijing* respectively.

振鷺于飞、于彼西雝。
我客戾止、亦有斯容。
在彼无恶、在此无斁。
庶几夙夜、以永终誉。

*A flock of egrets is flying ,
About the marsh there in the west .
My visitors came ,
With an [elegant] carriage like those birds .
There , [in their States] , not disliked ;
Here , [in Zhou] , never tired of ; –
They are sure , day and night ,
To penetrate their fame .⁸³*

Whereas in Homer, fame is celebrated as κλέος in over thirty passages throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁸⁴ For example in the *Odyssey* γ 203-204,

οἱ Ἀχαιοὶ οἴσουσι κλέος εὐρὺ καὶ ἐσσομένοισιν ἀοιδὴν
(*the Achaians will carry his glory far and wide, a theme for the singers to come*)

The phrase, ἡδ' ἵνα μὴν κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔχησιν
(*so that among people he may win a good reputation.*)

appears twice in the *Odyssey*, where the goddess Athene urges Telemachos to win a good reputation among his people.⁸⁵

⁸³ Here James Legge translates 以永终誉 as “to penetrate their fame”. But a more literal translation would be “to make their fame forever (永) and always (终).”

⁸⁴ The word κλέος appears 36 times in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.
Statistics from *The Chicago Homer Multilingual Database*.

Likewise in the *Shijing* 235 《文王》, King Wen's fame and reputation is praised as

without end (令闻不已),

亹亹文王、令闻不已。

*(Full of earnest activity was King Wen ,
And his fame is without end .)*

And in poem 252 《卷阿》, King Cheng 成王 is praised for his good reputation and good fame (令闻令望),

如圭如璋、令闻令望。

岂弟君子、四方为纲。

*(Full of dignity and majesty [are they] ,
Like a jade-mace [in its purity] ,
The subject of praise , the contemplation of hope .
O happy and courteous sovereign ,
[Through them] the four quarters [of the kingdom] are guided by you .)*

Hence, we can see in early Greek and Chinese society, fame and reputation were important aspects of social life. Being handed down from an oral poetic tradition, these archaic values became common themes for oral poetry shared by both the *Shijing* and Homer.

⁸⁵ The *Odyssey* α 95 and γ 78.

Nature, plants and animals

Another aspect which the *Shijing* and Homer both share in terms of content is their extensive reference to nature. For example, in poem 48 《桑中》,

爰采唐矣、沫之乡矣。
云谁之思、美孟姜矣。
期我乎桑中、要我乎上宫、送我乎淇之上矣。

爰采麦矣、沫之北矣。
云谁之思、美孟弋矣。
期我乎桑中、要我乎上宫、送我乎淇之上矣。

爰采葑矣、沫之东矣。
云谁之思、美孟庸矣。
期我乎桑中、要我乎上宫、送我乎淇之上矣。

*(I am going to gather the dodder,
In the fields of Mei.
But of whom are my thoughts?
Of that beauty, the eldest of the Jiang.
She made an appointment with me in Sangzhong;
She will meet me in Shanggong;
She will accompany me to Qishang.*

*I am going to gather the wheat,
In the north of Mei.
But of whom are my thoughts?
Of that beauty, the eldest of the Yi.
She made an appointment with me in Sangzhong;
She will meet me in Shanggong;
She will accompany me to Qishang.*

*I am going to gather the mustard plant,,
In the east of Mei.
But of whom are my thoughts?
Of that beauty, the eldest of the Yong.
She made an appointment with me in Sangzhong;
She will meet me in Shanggong;
She will accompany me to Qishang.)*

This is a simple love poem about a boy dating a girl. However, each stanza opens by mentioning different plants such as 唐 dodder, 麦 wheat and 葑 mustard plant. This style of composition is very common in the *Shijing* and is traditionally referred to as *xing* 兴. The poets' natural environment, such as plants, animals and natural scenery, are evoked to initiate poetry in this mode of composition in the *Shijing*. Likewise, in poem 167 《采薇》, the growth of a plant, the thorn-fern 薇, is used to characterize the passage of time for a soldier yearning to return home from war,

采薇采薇、薇亦作止。
曰歸曰歸、歲亦莫止。
靡室靡家、玁狁之故。
不遑啟居、玁狁之故。
采薇采薇、薇亦柔止。
曰歸曰歸、心亦憂止。
憂心烈烈、載飢載渴。
我戍未定、靡使歸聘。
采薇采薇、薇亦剛止。
曰歸曰歸、歲亦陽止。

王事靡盬、不遑啟處。

憂心孔疚、我行不來。

駕彼四牡、四牡騤騤。

君子所依、小人所腓。

四牡翼翼、象弭魚服。

豈不日戒、玁狁孔亟。

彼爾維何、維常之華。

彼路斯何、君子之車。

戎車既駕、四牡業業。

豈敢定居、一月三捷。

駕彼四牡、四牡騤騤。

君子所依、小人所腓。

四牡翼翼、象弭魚服。

豈不日戒、玁狁孔亟。

昔我往矣、楊柳依依。

今我來思、雨雪靡靡。

行道遲遲、載渴載飢。

我心傷悲、莫知我哀。

(Let us gather the thorn-ferns , let us gather the thorn-ferns ;

The thorn-ferns are now springing up .

When shall we return ? When shall we return ?

It will be late in the [next] year .

Wife and husband will be separated ,

Because of the Xian-yun .

We shall have no leisure to rest ,

Because of the Xian-yun .

Let us gather the thorn-ferns , let us gather the thorn-ferns ;

The thorn-ferns are now tender .

*When shall we return ? When shall we return ?
Our hearts are sorrowful ;
Our hearts are sad and sorrowful ;
We shall hunger , we shall thirst .
While our service on guard is not finished ,
We can send no one home to enquire about our families .
Let us gather the thorn-ferns , let us gather the thorn-ferns ;
The thorn-ferns are now hard .*

*When shall we return ? When shall we return ?
The year will be in the tenth month .
But the king's business must not be slackly performed ;
We shall have no leisure to rest .
Our sorrowing hearts are in great distress ;
But we shall not return from our expedition .*

***What is that so gorgeous ?
It is the flowers of the cherry tree .***

*What carriage is that ?
It is the carriage of our general .
His war carriage is yoked ;
The four steeds are strong .
Dare we remain inactive ?
In one month we shall have three victories .
The four steeds are yoked ,
The four steeds , eager and strong ; --
The confidence of the general ,
The protection of the men .
The four steeds move regularly, like wings ; --
There are the bow with its ivory ends , and the seal-skin quiver.
Shall we not daily warn one another?
The business of the Xian-yun is very urgent.*

*At first, when we set out ,
The willows were fresh and green ;
Now , when we shall be returning ,
The snow will be falling in clouds .
Long and tedious will be our marching ;
We shall hunger ; we shall thirst .
Our hearts are wounded with grief ,
And no one knows our sadness .)*

In the above poem, the passage of time is reflected in the growth of the thorn-fern 薇 from springing up (薇亦作止), to becoming tender (薇亦柔止) and finally, having become full grown, to becoming hard (薇亦刚止). This close observation of nature resonates with Confucius's comments for the *Shijing*, “诗，可以兴，可以观，可以群，可以怨。迩之事父，远之事君。多识于鸟兽草木之名。”⁸⁶

In fact, in the *Shijing* alone, there are over one hundred and twelve different animal names and over one hundred and sixty different plant names mentioned.⁸⁷ This is a huge number when compared to other ancient texts.

Likewise, in Homer, there are also many animals and plants mentioned. For example, over fifty botanical names are recorded throughout the two epics.⁸⁸ As for animals, sixty

⁸⁶ “*The Odes serve to stimulate the mind. They may be used for purposes of self-contemplation. They teach the art of sociability. They show how to regulate feelings of resentment. From them you learn the more immediate duty of serving one's father, and the remoter one of serving one's prince. From them we become largely acquainted with the names of birds, beasts, and plants.*”

James Legge trans. *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. IV, (Rpt. Hong Kong, 1939.)

⁸⁷ 高明乾，佟玉华，刘坤（2005）《诗经动物释诂》北京市：中华书局. p. 1.

高明乾，佟玉华，刘坤（2005）《诗经植物释诂》西安市：三秦出版社. p. 1.

two different names for specific animals are found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁸⁹ Trees, animals and plants were used extensively to describe action and illustrate the landscape in Homer. For example, in *Odyssey* η 112-116, the garden of Alcinous is described with great detail for its abundance of fruit trees,

ἔκτοσθεν δ' αὐλῆς μέγας ὄρχατος ἄγχι θυράων
τετράγνους περί δ' ἔρκος ἐλήλαται ἀμφοτέρωθεν
ἔνθα δέ δένδρεα μακρά πεφύκει τηλεθάοντα
ὄγχναι καί ῥοιαί καί μηλέαι ἀγλαόκαρποι
συκέαι τε γλυκεραί καί ἐλαῖαι τηλεθόωσαι

*(On the outside of the courtyard and next the doors is his orchard,
a great one, four land measures, with a fence driven all around it,
and there is the place where his fruit trees are grown tall and flourishing,
pear trees and pomegranate trees and apple trees with their shining
fruit, and the sweet fig trees and the flourishing olive.)*

In *Iliad* Π 482-489, when Sarpedon is struck down by Patroclus, Homer describes his fall with an extensive display of animals and plants,

ἦριπε δ' ὥς ὅτε τις δρῦς ἦριπεν ἢ ἀχερωΐς
ἦέ πίτυς βλωθρή τήν τ' οὔρεσι τέκτονες ἄνδρες
ἐξέταμον πελέκεσσι νεήκεσι νήϊον εἶναι
ὥς ὁ πρόσθ' ἵππων καί δίφρου κείτο τανυσθείς

⁸⁸ Edward S. Forster (1936) "Trees and Plants in Homer" *The Classical Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Jul., 1936), p. 98.

⁸⁹ Julius Sachs (1886) "Notes on Homeric Zoology" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1869-1896), Vol. 17. (1886), p. 17.

βεβρυχῶς κόνιος δεδραγμένος αἵματοέσσης
ἤϋτε ταῦρον ἔπεφνε λέων ἀγέληφι μετελθών
αἰθωνα μεγάθυμον ἐν εἰλιπόδεσσι βόεσσι
ᾤλετο τε στενάχων ὑπὸ γαμφηλῆσι λέοντος

*(He fell, as when an **oak** goes down or a **white poplar**
or like a **towering pine tree** which in the mountains the carpenters
have hewn down with their whetted axes to make a ship timber.
So he lay there felled in front of his horses and chariot,
roaring, and clawed with his hands at the bloody dust; or as
a blazing and haughty **bull** in a huddle of **shambling cattle**
when a **lion** has come among the herd and destroys him
dies bellowing under the **hooked claws of the lion**.)*

Here, the fall of Sarpedon is likened to an oak, a white poplar or a pine tree being fell down by mountain carpenters. The death struggle of Sarpedon is likened to a bull amongst cattle being destroyed by the γαμφηλῆσι λέοντος (*hooked claws of the lion*).

This great attention paid to nature, plants and animals is another aspect which the Homeric poems share with the *Shijing* in terms of content.

Digressions

However, one of the most odd and intriguing content that the *Shijing* shares with Homer is digression. Take poem 197 in the *Shijing* for example,

《小雅·小弁》

弁彼鶯斯，归飞提提。

民莫不穀，我独于罹。

何辜于天？我罪伊何？

心之忧矣，云如之何？

踯躅周道，鞠为茂草。

我心忧伤，惄焉如捣。

假寐永叹，维忧用老。

心之忧矣，疢如疾首。

维桑与梓，必恭敬止。

靡瞻匪父，靡依匪母。

不属于毛？不罹于里？

天之生我，我辰安在？

菀彼柳斯，鸣蜩嘒嘒，

有漙者渊，萑苇淠淠。

譬彼舟流，不知所届，

心之忧矣，不遑假寐。

鹿斯之奔，维足伎伎。

雉之朝雉，尚求其雌。

譬彼坏木，疾用无枝。

心之忧矣，宁莫之知？

相彼投兔，尚或先之。

行有死人，尚或瑾之。

君子秉心，维其忍之。

心之忧矣，涕既陨之。

君子信谗，如或酬之。

君子不惠，不舒究之。

伐木掎矣，析薪扞矣。

舍彼有罪，予之佗矣。

莫高匪山，莫浚匪泉。

君子无易由言，耳属于垣。

无逝我梁，无发我笱。

我躬不阅，遑恤我后。

*(With flapping wings the crows ,
Come back , flying all in a flock .
Other people all are happy ,
And I only am full of misery .
What is my offence against Heaven ?
What is my crime ?
My heart is sad ; --
What is to be done ?*

The way to Zhou should be level and easy ,
 But it is all overgrown with rank grass .
 My heart is wounded with sorrow ,
 And I think till I feel as if pounded [all over] .
 I lie down undressed , and sigh continually ;
 Through my grief I am growing old .
 My heart is sad ; --
 It puts me in pain like a headache .
Even the mulberry trees and the Zi ,
Must be regarded with reverence :
 But no one is to be looked up to like a father ;
 No one is to be depended on like a mother .
 Have I not a connection with the hairs [of my father] ?
 Did I not dwell in the womb [of my mother] ?
 O Heaven who gave me birth !
 How was it at such an inauspicious time ?
Luxuriant grow those willows ,
And the cicadas [on them] go hui-hui .
Deep looks the pool ,
And abundantly grow the rushes and reeds [about it] ,
 [But] I am like a boat adrift , --
 Where it will go you know not .
 My heart is sad ; --
 I have not leisure to lie down [even] undressed .
The stag is running away ,
But his legs move slowly .
The pheasant crows in the morning ,
Seeking his mate .
 I am like a ruined tree ,
 Stript by disease of all its branches .

My heart is sad ; --
How is it that no one knows me ?
Look at the hare seeking protection ; --
Some one will step in before and save it .
One the road there is a dead man ;
Some one will bury him .
[But] such is the heart of our sovereign ,
That there is nothing he cannot bear to do .
My heart is sad ,
So that my tears are falling down .
Our sovereign believes slanders ,
As readily as he joins in the pledge cup .
Our sovereign is unkind ,
And does not leisurely examine into things .
The tree-fellers follow the lean of the tree ;
The faggot-cleavers follow the direction of the grain ;
[But] he lets alone the guilty ,
And imputes guilt to me .
There is nothing higher than a mountain ;
There is nothing deeper than a [great] spring .
Our sovereign should not lightly utter his words ,
Lest an ear be laid close to the wall .
Do not approach my dam ;
Do not remove my basket .
My person is rejected ; --
Of what use is it to care for what may come after ?)

In this poem, the poet's lamentation of his sorrowful heart (心之忧矣) is interrupted by seemingly irrelevant digressions, such as luxuriant willows, chirping cicadas and a running stag, as indicated in bold above. The presence of these plants and animals do not

seem to have direct relation with the theme of sorrow and appear abruptly inserted into the poem. There have been many explanations on why these scenes appear. Traditionally, when a poem opens with these digressions of nature, this mode of composition is known as *xing* 兴. However, the relationship between *xing* and the theme of the poem may or may not be directly related. Sometimes they are even cryptic. Therefore, many debates have arisen on the nature of *xing*. Haun Saussy (1997) once attempted to explain *xing* from a rhythmic perspective,

“the first rhyme seems to determine the second rhyme, from the composer's point of view the main subject, and accordingly the second rhyme dominates. The composer of a Guo feng stanza no doubt settled on the concluding rhyme first and then selected an appropriate xing that would deliver the needed opening rhyme”.⁹⁰

Here, Saussy argues that *xing*, the evocative initiator of poetry, depends on the rhythmic quality of the subject. For example, he cites poem 131 《黄鸟》,

交交黄鸟、止于棘。
谁从穆公、子车奄息。
维此奄息、百夫之特。
临其穴、惻惻其栗。
彼苍者天、歼我良人。
如可赎兮、人百其身。
交交黄鸟、止于桑。
谁从穆公、子车仲行。
维此仲行、百夫之防。

⁹⁰ Haun Saussy (1997) “Repetition, Rhyme and Exchange in the Book of Odes” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2. (Dec., 1997), p. 531.

临其穴、惴惴其栗。

彼苍者天、歼我良人。

如可赎兮、人百其身。

交交黄鸟、止于楚。

谁从穆公、子车针虎。

维此针虎、百夫之御。

临其穴、惴惴其栗。

彼苍者天、歼我良人。

如可赎兮、人百其身。

(They flit about , the yellow birds ,

And rest upon the jujube trees .

Who followed duke Mu [to the grave] ?

Ziche Yansi .

And this Yansi ,

Was a man above a hundred .

When he came to the grave ,

He looked terrified and trembled .

Thou azure Heaven there !

Thou art destroying our good men .

Could he have been redeemed ,

We should have given a hundred lives for him .

They flit about , the yellow birds ,

And rest upon the mulberry trees .

Who followed duke Mu [to the grave] ?

Ziche Zhongheng .

And this Zhongheng ,

Was a match for a hundred .

When he came to the grave ,

He looked terrified and trembled .

Thou azure Heaven there !
Thou art destroying our good men .
Could he have been redeemed ,
We should have given a hundred lives for him .
They flit about , the yellow birds ,
And rest upon the thorn trees .
Who followed duke Mu [to the grave] ?
Ziche Qianhu .
And this Ziche Qianhu ,
Could withstand a hundred men .
When he came to the grave ,
He looked terrified and trembled .
Thou azure Heaven there !
Thou art destroying our good men .
Could he have been redeemed ,
We should have given a hundred lives for him.)

In this poem the opening rhymes are plant names and the last rhyme-word is the name of an individual. The poet would not have been free to alter the name of the individual commemorated, but the plant names could be chosen freely to suit the needs of rhyming. Therefore, the seemingly random plant digressions were in fact necessary for the poem to rhyme.⁹¹ However, not every poem can be explained in this way, as digressions of plants and animals may occur anywhere in a poem and not always be in the opening rhyme. Pauline Yu (1983) gives a more comprehensive explanation, explaining *xing* in terms of analogy and typology. She writes,

⁹¹ Haun Saussy (1997) "Repetition, Rhyme and Exchange in the Book of Odes" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2. (Dec., 1997), p. 531.

*“from the Chinese point of view it was not a process of attributing true otherness of reference at all: natural object and human situation were seen literally as belonging to the same category of events – it was not the poet who was creating or manufacturing the links between them. They were linked by analogy, but not – as in the Western case of allegory – one between two distinct orders. The critic’s task lay simply in identifying the general type to which both belonged. In this respect the traditional readings are perhaps closer to those of typology rather than allegory.”*⁹²

Yu argues that these images of nature in the *Shijing* were not allegories but rather typological associations. This explanation falls closer to traditional interpretations and takes into account the context and historicity of the *Shijing* poems. As we shall see, it is the traditional oral context of the *Shijing* and Homeric poems that warrant such random digressions of nature, plants and animals in early oral poetry.

Oral Context of Visual Digressions

In his celebrated essay of literary criticism, Auerbach (1953) argues that Homeric poetry is characterized by a visual externalization of digressive detail.⁹³ He gives the example of the famous Homeric scar --- when Odysseus returns home in disguise, nobody recognizes him. But when the housemaid Euryklea washes his feet, as an act of hospitality towards a stranger, she feels with her hand and recognizes the scar on Odysseus’ foot. At this dramatic moment, the narrative is interrupted by around forty lines of digression, describing the origin of the scar from a hunting accident which occurred in Odysseus’

⁹² Pauline R. Yu (1983) “Allegory, Allegoresis, and The Classic of Poetry” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2. (Dec., 1983), p. 399.

⁹³ Erich Auerbach (1953) *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. (trans.) Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 3-23.

boyhood at a boar hunt during the time of visit to his grandfather Autolycus. The narrative then gradually digresses into the life of Autolycus, his house, the precise degree of kinship, his character, and even his changed behaviour after the birth of his grandson. Then follows another digression of Odysseus' visit, the exchange of greetings and a welcoming banquet with wine and meat, that night's sweet sleep and waking in the morning for the hunt, the tracking of the beast in a forested mountain, the struggle, Odysseus' being wounded by the boar's tusk, his recovery, his return to Ithaka and even his parents' anxious questions --- all is narrated with a complete visual externalization of details of the story before the digression is finally finished and Euryklea, who had recognized the scar before the digression began, lets Odysseus's foot drop back into the water basin in surprise.

Auerbach argued that this kind of digression was what characterized the Homeric style: a complete visual externalization of phenomena with a uniformly illuminated foreground in terms perceptible to the senses. Auerbach writes,

*"the separate phenomena themselves, their relationships --- their temporal, local, causal, final, consecutive, comparative, concessive, antithetical, and conditional limitations --- are brought to light in perfect fullness; so that a continuous rhythmic procession of phenomena passes by."*⁹⁴

Therefore, according to Auerbach, the digressions were necessary because the Homeric style tended to visualize everything with a uniformly illuminated foreground. Every detail,

⁹⁴ Erich Auerbach (1953) *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. (trans.) Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 6.

every temporal, local relationship, though it may be unessential to the main narrative, was to be taken into consideration for its contribution to an artistic effect of visualization.

Drawing upon Auerbach's insights, Bakker (1999) points out that these visually externalized digressions were not so much a stylistic choice of Homer as it is related to the functioning of the epic medium of oral performance.⁹⁵ He cites Notopoulos (1949), who had once pointed out that,

*"it is easier to digress and lose sight of the original purpose in the spoken word than in formal writing which follows an organized text with a beginning, middle, and an end"*⁹⁶

Bakker argues that these Homeric digressions were actually a product of orally improvised poetry, as oral traditions all over the world are characterized by vivid, concrete, visual detail. For the epic tradition to survive, these visual digressions were indispensable mnemonic devices for the oral poet to remember and recite his poetry. In his recent study, cognitive psychologist David Rubin has emphasized the importance of imagery in the stability of oral traditions, noting that visual imagery is one of our most powerful mnemonic aids and that images and spatial relations between items are easier to retain in memory than verbal, linear information.⁹⁷ A good example to illustrate this would be the supplication scene in *Iliad* A, where the priest does not "come" to promise a ransom. Instead he "carries" it in his hands *visually*, and in his hand is a golden staff

⁹⁵ Egbert J. Bakker (1999) "Mimesis as Performance: Rereading Auerbach's First Chapter" *Poetics Today* 20:1 (Spring 1999), pp. 12-24.

⁹⁶ James Notopoulos (1949) "Parataxis in Homer: A New Approach to Homeric Literary Criticism," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 80: 16.

⁹⁷ David Rubin (1995) *Memory and Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 62.

wrought with the ribbons of Apollo. These digressive attributes, unessential to the main story, are in fact a necessary visualization of the scene and its actors, an indispensable setting for the oral poet to visualize the poem and memorize and recite it.⁹⁸

If we compare this phenomena with the *xing* 兴 digressions in the *Shijing*, then many previously unsolved problems may be explained. Pauline Yu once contended that the digressive images of nature were part of the historical and traditional context of the *Shijing*. Therefore, she argues that *xing* 兴 should be understood from an analogical and typological perspective.⁹⁹ We agree with Pauline Yu that the *xing* 兴 digressions depend on a traditional context. However, this traditional context should first and foremost be understood from an oral poetic perspective, as the seemingly irrelevant *xing* digressions in the *Shijing* were in fact visual externalizations of the poetic context in which the *Shijing* register functioned. In other words, it was necessary to first visualize a context, such as a flowing river or a wooded forest, before the oral poet can properly express his joy or lament in the *Shijing*. The *Shijing* poem must hinge upon some visual entity for it to properly function, as this is a characteristic of oral poetry. As Ong (1982) observed,

"In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human life world, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of

⁹⁸ Eric Havelock (1963) *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. pp. 187-188.

⁹⁹ Pauline R. Yu (1983) "Allegory, Allegoresis, and The Classic of Poetry" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2. (Dec., 1983), p. 399.

human beings”¹⁰⁰

In other words, the *Shijing* poem must fasten itself upon at least some definite illuminated entity. For example in poem 9 《汉广》,

南有乔木、不可休思。
汉有游女、不可求思。
汉之广矣、不可泳思。
江之永矣、不可方思。
翘翘错薪、言刈其楚。
之子于归、言秣其马。
汉之广矣、不可泳思。
江之永矣、不可方思。
翘翘错薪、言刈其蒺。
之子于归、言秣其驹。
汉之广矣、不可泳思。
江之永矣、不可方思。

*(In the south rise the trees without branches ,
Affording no shelter .
By the Han are girls rambling about ,
But it is vain to solicit them .
The breath of the Han
Cannot be dived across ;
The length of the Jiang
Cannot be navigated with a raft .
Many are the bundles of firewood ;
I would cut down the thorns [to form more] .*

¹⁰⁰ W. J. Ong (1982). *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the world*. New York: Routledge. p. 42.

Those girls are getting married, --
I would feed their horses .
The breadth of the Han
Cannot be dived across ;
The length of the Jiang ,
Cannot be navigated with a raft .
Many are the bundles of firewood ;
I would cut down the southern wood [to form more] .
Those girls are getting married , --
I would feed their colts .
The breadth of the Han
Cannot be dived across ;
The length of the Jiang
Cannot be navigated with a raft .)

The emotions in this poem are hinged upon various visual externalizations. For example, at the start of the poem is a locative hinge “*in the south* (南有乔木)” and then “*by the Han* (汉有游女)”. Then the visual images of bundles of firewood (翘翘错薪) and feeding the horse (言秣其马) are evoked to visualize the young man’s dream of marrying the girl (之子于归).

In fact the formulaic phrase of marriage (之子于归) is always visualized throughout all its occurrences in the *Shijing*. For example, in poem 6 《桃夭》 ,

桃之夭夭、灼灼其华。
 之子于归、宜其家室。
(The peach tree is young and elegant ;
Brilliant are its flowers .

This young lady is getting married ,
And will order well her chamber and house .)

the marriage is visualized through the young peach tree (桃之夭夭) and its brilliant
flowers (灼灼其华). Or in poem 12 《 鹊巢 》 ,

维鹊有巢、维鸠居之。

之子于归、百两御之。

(The nest is the magpie's;

The dove dwells in it.

This young lady is getting married;

A hundred carriages are meeting her.)

the marriage is visualized through the dove and the magpie's nest (维鹊有巢).

In poem 28 《 燕燕 》 ,

燕燕于飞、差池其羽。

之子于归、远送于野。

(The swallows go flying about ,

With their wings unevenly displayed .

The lady is getting married,

And I escorted her far into the country .)

the marriage is visualized through the swallows flying about and their fluffy wings in
display. And finally in poem 156 《 东山 》 ,

我徂东山、慆慆不归。

我来自东、零雨其蒙。

仓庚于飞、熠熠其羽。

之子于归、皇驳其马。
亲结其缡、九十其仪。
其新孔嘉、其旧如之何。

*(We went to the hills of the east ,
And long were we there without returning ,
On our way back from the east ,
Down came the rain drizzlingly .
The oriole is flying about ,
Now here , now there , are its wings .
Those young ladies are going to be married ,
With their bay and red horses , flecked with white .
Their mothers have tied their sashes ;
Complete are their equipments .
The new matches are admirable ; --
How can the reunions of the old be expressed?)*

Notice how different each time the marriage motif “之子于归” varies from one another.

Sometimes it is described with firewood (翹翹错薪), sometimes with feeding the horse (言秣其马), sometimes with peaches and flowers (桃之夭夭、灼灼其华)

, sometimes with the magpie's nest (维鹊有巢), sometimes with the fluttering wings of swallows (燕燕于飞、差池其羽) and lastly with a flying oriole (仓庚于飞).

If we explain these *xing* digressive images in terms of analogy and typology, it would be difficult and far-stretching to group them together in one category and call them marriage motifs. Rather, it would be more appropriate to describe these images as externalized visual points of references which the oral poem hinges itself upon.

Using this explanation, then many *xing* 兴 in the Shijing may be explained satisfactorily.

For example poem 91 《子襟》 ,

青青子衿、悠悠我心。

纵我不往、子宁不嗣音。

青青子佩、悠悠我思。

纵我不往、子宁不来。

挑兮达兮、在城阙兮。

一日不见、如三月兮。

(O you , with the blue collar ,

Prolonged is the anxiety of my heart .

Although I do not go [to you] ,

Why do you not continue your messages [to me] ?

O you with the blue [strings to your] girdle-gems ,

Long , long do I think of you .

Although I do not go [to you] ,

Why do you not come [to me] ?

How volatile are you and dissipated ,

By the look-out tower on the wall !

One day without the sight of you ,

Is like three months .)

The bluish collar (青青子衿) and bluish girdle-gems (青青子佩) may be understood as ornamental hinges, which the poet hinges upon visually for the longing of her lover.

Similarly, poems such as 《正月》 and 《十月之交》 start by referring to the month of events, thereby providing a temporal hinge for the oral poem. Or consider poem 59 《竹竿》, where every alternate line is paired with a visual setting before the poet's emotions for the girl are expressed,

籊籊竹竿、以钓于淇。	(visual setting)
岂不尔思、远莫致之。	(emotion)
泉源在左、淇水在右。	(visual setting)
女子有行、远兄弟父母。	(event)
淇水在右、泉源在左。	(visual setting)
巧笑之璫、佩玉之雝。	(visual setting)
淇水泱泱、桼楫松舟。	(visual setting)
驾言出游、以写我忧。	(event + emotion)

*(With your long and tapering bamboo rods ,
 You angle in the Qi .
 Do I not think of you ?
 But I am far away , and cannot get you .
 The Quanyuan is on the left ,
 And the waters of the Qi are on the right .
 But when a young lady goes away , [and is married] ,
 She leaves her brothers and parents .
 The waters of the Qi are on the right
 And the Quanyuan is on the left .
 How shine the white teeth through the artful smiles !
 How the girdle gems move to the measured steps !
 The waters of the Qi flow smoothly ;
 There are the oars of cedar and boats of pine .*

*Might I but go there in my carriage and ramble ,
To dissipate my sorrow!)*

In fact, a close observation of all of the *Shijing* poems reveal a substantial amount of visual quality in the poetic setting before the lament or praise is properly expressed.

Therefore, we contend that the *xing* 兴 digressions were in fact part of an integral part of the *Shijing* oral poetic tradition. It visually illuminates the stage for poetic expression in the *Shijing* poetic register. This stage may be locative, temporal, ornamental, instrumental, botanical, zoological, etc. Whether the visual setting is related or not with the event taking place is not always important, as it is merely a visual setting for the poem to “hinge upon” in an orally transmitted medium.

Summary

From our analysis of the *Shijing*’s and Homer’s content, it is evident that both share a multitude of similarities in terms of content reflecting archaic society. For example, the detailed description of sacrificial procedures, the emphasis on war and glory, the extensive display of plants and animals, and most of all the digressive nature of the *Shijing* and Homeric poems, reflecting an oral poetic tradition that relied on visual externalization for mnemonic and oral transmission. Throughout our comparison, we have also offered a new perspective on explaining *xing* 兴 in terms of visual quality in oral poetry. Again, this is a good example of how research on Homeric studies may be applied to the *Shijing* through the common medium of traditional oral poetics.

FIVE

Remaining Differences between the *Shijing* and Homer

Difference in length

So far we have been arguing for the *Shijing*'s similarities with the Homeric epics.

However, it would be unconvincing if the differences between the *Shijing* and Homer were not addressed. The first most obvious difference is that of length. While the *Shijing* is a collection of short poems, the Homeric poems are a long unified narrative. Because of this difference, for a long time the *Shijing* was not recognized as "epic" because of its shorter length. However, as we have discussed above, the definition of "epic" is highly contentious and problematic. The essential qualities of Homeric poetry, as we have demonstrated, can all be found in the *Shijing*.

Futhermore, although the Homeric poems are a unified narrative, the poem itself can actually be read as a series of smaller poems dexterously merged together. Each of the twenty-four chapters in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* may be read independently as poems on their own. Many portions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* may be detached from the whole and made into separate songs, such as the story of Aphrodite and Ares sung by Demodocus, or Odysseus' false Cretan story. The bard may easily fit three of these short "epics" into a single evening. And pieces like these must have been the forerunners of the poem as it now exists. Several chapters in the *Iliad*, such as the Embassy to Achilles, the Story of Dolon, the Ransoming of Hector, are complete unities, each with its own story and

atmosphere, and might well be recited separately for their own merits.¹⁰¹ These many short stories scattered throughout Homer's narrative, are all stories within stories by themselves. In this sense, it is similar to the *Shijing*, except only that the short poems remained loosely independent in the *Shijing*, while the Homeric poems have been merged together to form a larger unified poem. Hence, it is inaccurate to call the *Shijing* a collection of "short" poems as opposed to Homer's two "long" poems, as the consideration of the *Shijing*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as complete unified texts is only a traditional convention.

Narrative versus Lyric

Another main point of dispute is that the poems in the *Shijing* are considered short and therefore "lyrical" whereas the Homeric epics are long and therefore "narrative". However, as we have seen above, length does not necessarily determine the lyrical or narrative nature of poetry. Besides, in classical Greek poetics, the criterion of lyrical versus narrative was not always in direct opposition as it is today. The word "lyrical" in Greek, λυρικός, simply meant "sung with the lyre".¹⁰² Therefore, there was a genre of "lyrical narratives" simply meaning "stories sung by the lyre". This was a popular genre in southern Italy and Sicily. For example, Corinna tells stories in a lyric manner composed in strophes for musical accompaniment. Pindar, Bacchylides and many other authors also do not make a clear distinction between lyrical and narrative. For example, the long lyrical narratives of Stesichorus, such as *Ἰλίου Περσις*, *Νοστοί*, *Γρυονίς*,

¹⁰¹ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 31.

¹⁰² *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition, ed. Liddell, Scott & Jones, Oxford, 1996.

Ευρωπεια, Αθλα ἐπὶ Ἡελιαί, are simultaneously considered “long”, “lyrical” and “narrative”.¹⁰³ The Homeric Hymns are “short” and “lyrical”, but also “narrative”.

Therefore, in ancient Greece, the distinction between lyrical and narrative was not always in clear opposition and can often overlap.

In fact, if we examine the poems in the *Shijing*, many may be classified as “lyrical narratives”. For example, poem 58 《氓》 tells the sad story in lyric manner of how a woman fell in love with her husband, but how he abandoned her. Or in poem 245 《生民》 where the mythical story of Hou Ji’s (后稷) legendary birth and his agricultural talents is told. Pieces such as poem 206 《无将大车》 or poem 184 《鹤鸣》 are often considered as philosophical poems. Therefore, it is misleading to generalize the *Shijing* as lyrical, as many poems may be classified as narratives as well as philosophical.

Hence, to call the *Shijing* “lyric” and Homer “narrative” is a generalizing and crude classification, which fails to take into account the complexity and historical context of the poems by using modern literary terms to evaluate ancient oral poetry.

¹⁰³ C.M. Bowra (1930) *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 35.

Cultural Differences

Besides the above, there are also some subtle cultural differences between the *Shijing* and Homer which can reflect the different attitudes which the ancient Greeks and Chinese held towards life and the cosmos. The most obvious difference is the greater role which gods played in Homer when compared to the *Shijing*. In Homer, every human action is orchestrated by the gods. For example, courage is inspired by the gods. “αὐτὰρ θάρσος ἐνέπνευσεν μέγα δαίμων” (*Then some divinity breathed great courage into us.*)¹⁰⁴ A thought is “put” into one’s mind by a god: “Αὐτόμεδον τίς τοί νυ θεῶν νηκερδέα βουλήν ἐν στήθεσσι νῆθηκε” (*Automedon, what god put this unprofitable plan into your heart?*)¹⁰⁵ Even human stupidity is attributed to the gods by claiming that they took away men’s wits, “ἔνθ’ αὖτε Γλαύκῳ Κρονίδης φρένας ἐξέλετο Ζεὺς” (*but Zeus the son of Kronos stole away the wits of Glaukos*)¹⁰⁶

On the contrary, gods never played such an important role in the *Shijing*. Everything was centred around humans. King Wen was praised as a virtuous man: “亶亶文王、令闻不已。”¹⁰⁷ War was attributed to scandalous men: “民之讹言、亦孔之将。”¹⁰⁸ Even sacrificial rites were dedicated to men: grandfathers and ancestors, instead of gods. The colourful pantheon of Greek gods is nowhere to be seen in the *Shijing*. Rather, there was

¹⁰⁴ *Odyssey* 9. 381

¹⁰⁵ *Iliad* 17. 469-470.

¹⁰⁶ *Iliad* 6. 234.

¹⁰⁷ Trans. “Full of earnest activity was King Wen, And his fame is without end” in the *Shijing* 235 《文王》.

¹⁰⁸ Trans. “The false calumnies of the people, Also wax greater and greater.” in the *Shijing* 192 《正月》.

only one god, who was always referred to as *Tian* 天. But even this *Tian* did not hold such an important place in the *Shijing*. Consider the following poem 《小雅·信南山》 for example.

信彼南山、維禹甸之。畇畇原隰、曾孫田之。

我疆我理、南東其畝。上天同雲、雨雪雰雰。

益之以霡霂、既優既渥、既霑既足、生我百穀。

疆場翼翼、黍稷彧彧。曾孫之穡、以為酒食。

畀我尸賓、壽考萬年。中田有廬、疆場有瓜。

是剝是菹、獻之皇祖。曾孫壽考、受天之祜。

祭以清酒、從以騂牡、享于祖考。

執其鸞刀、以啟其毛、取其血膋。

是烝是享、苾苾芬芬、祀事孔明。

先祖是皇。報以介福、萬壽無疆。

Throughout the whole poem, the word *Tian* 天 only appears once, even though this poem is about sacrificial rites. Instead, images of farmland, rain and wine, millet and cattle abound. It seems that from very early on, the ancient Chinese were more practical and humanistic than her contemporaries. Some scholars have argued that this is because the *Shijing* is a product of Northern Chinese culture, where millet was the main crop grown in the Yellow River Valley. According to Ho Ping-ti (1975), this environment was very

harsh and farmers had to pay constant attention to ensure survival of the millet.¹⁰⁹ As a result, the Chinese were more pragmatic and paid less attention to gods.

Greece, on the other hand, was relatively plentiful, with “*well-polished tables heavily loaded with bread and meats and wine*”, (ἐϋξεστοὶ δὲ τράπεζαι σίτου καὶ κρειῶν ἥδ' οἶνου βεβρίθασιν)¹¹⁰ thus allowing the ancient Greeks more spare time to muse over the gods. The perilous oceans and misty seas also provided ample room for the imagination of sea gods and monsters. This is similar to the case of the *Chu Ci* 《楚辞》. With an environment of thick swamps, mysterious lakes and misty fog, Chu culture is also marked by a colourful pantheon of gods.¹¹¹

One of the consequences of this difference is that the heroes in Homer are generally more assertive when compared to the heroes in the *Shijing*. At the disposal of the ποικιλοθρων (changing-coloured) Greek gods and their unpredictable ways, bold action was necessary for the hero to assert himself and find order and certainty amidst the chaos and uncertainty in the Greek cosmos. This boldness is exactly what lifts the protagonist from the masses and elevates him to the status of a hero, as he is able to deal with perilous and uncertain situations when others are at a lost. As the goddess Athena puts it, “*the bold*

¹⁰⁹ Ho, Ping-ti (1975) *The cradle of the East : an inquiry into the indigenous origins of techniques and ideas of Neolithic and early historic China, 5000-1000 B.C.* . University of Chicago Press.

¹¹⁰ *Odyssey* 15. 333-334.

¹¹¹ 斯维至 (1994) “论《楚辞》的形成及秦楚文化圈” 陕西师大学报. 1994 年 12 月. 第 23 卷. 第 4 期. 23-29 页.

man proves the better for every action"¹¹². Therefore, Homer always talks about winning honour and glory, and actively asserting oneself in the Greek cosmos.

On the other hand, in the *Shijing*, boldness was undesired. Most of the poems in the *Shijing* were rustic descriptions of peasant life and nature. Everything is depicted *as it should be* picturesquely and realistically. Therefore, the heroes in the *Shijing* are those who respect and pay attention to the rules of nature and preserve this rustic harmony. King Wu of Zhou (周武王) was praised in the *Shijing* as a hero because he deposed the tyrant Zhou (纣), who disturbed this harmony and overstepped the boundaries of propriety. Unlike the warlike heroes in Homer, the heroes in the *Shijing* were those with moral courage, a relatively passive form of heroism that arises only when the rules of propriety and the preservation of harmony have been harmed.¹¹³ The restoration of harmony and order is a theme prevalent in the *Shijing*. Therefore, the observation that the Chinese are more passive and conservative while Westerners are more active and assertive can be traced back to as early as the *Shijing* and Homer.

Another interesting cultural difference that can be observed between the *Shijing* and Homer is that the former holds a relatively more optimistic worldview than the latter. As mentioned above, the heroes in the *Shijing* are concerned about preserving order and harmony. In the *Shijing*, the background is always harmony and order, while the foreground is war and chaos. According to this worldview, life was most of the time

¹¹² *Odyssey* 7.51

¹¹³ C.H. Wang (1988) *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays in Early Chinese Poetry*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

joyful and in harmony. Whereas war and chaos were only aberrations or mistakes when some immoral men upset this balance. Therefore, the people in the *Shijing* are generally more optimistic than those in Homer. Whenever there are problems, the Chinese simply believe that all they need to do is fix them. Then everything will return to its original state of harmony.¹¹⁴

However, in Homer, it was the opposite. The background of the Homeric world was constant chaos, while the foreground was transient order. In ancient Greece, the reality of life was much more pessimistic and uncertain. Everything was at the disposal of the unpredictable gods. As Homer exclaims, “*divine Zeus sometimes gives out good, or sometimes evil; he can do anything*”¹¹⁵ or “*it is a light thing for the gods who hold wide heaven to glorify any mortal man, or else to degrade him.*”¹¹⁶

Harmony and order were only transitory. The heroes in Homer, such as Achilles and Odysseus, always had to battle adversities and overcome uncertain situations before they can finally find peace and harmony. Therefore, the worldview found in Homer is much more pessimistic than that found in the *Shijing*.

These are some of the interesting cultural differences that can be observed between the *Shijing* and Homer.

¹¹⁴ This is also the theory behind Chinese medicine. Disease and illness were attributed to imbalances between Yin and Yang, the two forces that constitute harmony of the human body.

¹¹⁵ *Odyssey* 4. 236-237.

¹¹⁶ *Odyssey* 16. 211-212

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Conclusion

From our analysis above, it is clear that the *Shijing* 《诗经》 and Homer share a multitude of similarities. The differences that previously prevented the *Shijing* from being called “epic” proved to be confounded with problematic terms such as “epic”, “lyric” and “narrative”, all of which fail to take into account the historical and oral poetic context of the *Shijing* and Homer. Although there are certain cultural differences between the *Shijing* and Homer, these two works exhibit similarities in all other aspects of their poetry, namely flexible oral language, oral formulaic structure, digressive content and cardinality within the Chinese and Greek literary traditions. Both the *Shijing* and Homer are among the most quoted works in the Chinese and Western literary tradition respectively. The *Shijing* has been quoted profusely in the *Analects* 《论语》, *Li Ji* 《礼记》 and *Chun Qiu* 《春秋》. The Homeric poems have been quoted extensively by Plato, Aristotle and meticulously imitated by Virgil, Dante and Milton. The commentaries for the *Shijing* and Homer are among the most voluminous works in the Chinese and Western tradition respectively. The cardinal and revered status of these two works served as ultimate sources of inspiration for philosophers and poets alike in the Chinese and Western literary traditions. Their immense influence on the later development of Chinese and Western poetry, philosophy and culture is manifest. Therefore, summarizing all of the above, we conclude that the *Shijing* is China’s closest equivalent to Homer.

However, some may ask, why compare the *Shijing* with Homer? The reason is simple, because Homer is the most authoritative definition of the genre “epic”. For all its problematic and contradicting definitions, the Homeric poems have never been disputed as “epics”. This is because the genre of “epic” really comes from Homer. The remarkable quality and subtlety of Homer is the fundamental reason why the genre of “epic” has become famous and important in the first place. The significance, however, of identifying the *Shijing* as the closest equivalent of Homer, is not simply to claim that what the West has, China also has. Instead, it brings us back to the roots of these two great civilizations, and offers us a glimpse of our civilizations from the start. By comparing the *Shijing* with Homer, we may recover some very fascinating ancient values found in the *Shijing* before Confucianism added her own interpretations to Chinese classicism. For example, the concept of filial piety is less pronounced in the *Shijing* than in later classical texts. In the *Shijing*, the emphasis of ancestors is balanced with an equal emphasis on descendants as well. For example in poem 285 《武》, the poem emphasizes the King’s virtue of *opening the path for his descendants* (克开厥后). And in poem 282 《豳》, the King’s duty is to *ensure prosperity to his descendants* (克昌厥后). Or in poem 209 《楚茨》 to *appease thy descendants* (以绥后祿). And in poem 253 《民劳》, the poet urges young descendants to be brave and take up responsibility, “*Though you may be young, Your responsibility is vast and great.*” (戎虽小子，而式宏大). This is also the same in Homer. Homer often urges men to think about their descendants, “ἀλκιμος ἔσσι’ ἵνα τις σέ καί ὀψιγόνων ἐϋ εἴπῃ” (*be brave too, so that men unborn may speak well of you.*)¹¹⁷ or,

¹¹⁷ *Odyssey* 3. 200

“ἡδέ κε καί σῶ παιδί μέγα κλέος ἦρα' ὀπίσσω.” (*and you would have won great glory for your son hereafter.*)¹¹⁸

In the *Shijing* there is also a better balance between civility (文) martial valour (武).

Instead of the Neo-Confucian's over-emphasis on civility (文), the *Shijing* praises both civility (文) martial valour (武) with equal accolade. For example in poem 38 《簡兮》, the poet praises the hero's strength *as strong as a tiger* and his *superb skills in reining the horses*. “有力如虎、執轡如組”. In poem 213, the gentleman is praised as being able to safeguard his family and country. 《瞻彼洛矣》 “君子萬年、保其家邦”. Likewise, the hero Nanzhong in poem 168 《出車》 “赫赫南仲、薄伐西戎。” is praised for his martial valour in conquering the much feared *Xianyun* (獫狁) tribes. Therefore, we can see that in the *Shijing*, martial valour was just as prized as good civil manners.

There is an interesting line in poem 55 《淇奥》 that reads, “善戏谑兮、不为虐兮。”

(*Skilful is he at quips and jokes, But how does he keep from rudeness from them!*)

This line of poetry shows that this Chinese gentleman is upright and *keeps away from rudeness* (虐). But at the same time he is also shrewd and crafty, *skilful at quips and jokes* (谑). The difference between 谑 and 虐 is subtle and displays a rich and multi-sided personality and a unity of contradictions. But for the Neo-Confucians this line of poetry for them would definitely be “不戏谑兮、不为虐兮”, which would be dull and boring.

¹¹⁸ *Odyssey* 24. 33

Therefore, recognizing the *Shijing* as China's epic allows us to re-discover the vitality and diversity of ancient Chinese values before Confucianism officially "took over" and added rigid boundaries to define (*or confine?*) Chinese culture. The comparison between the *Shijing* and Homer brings us back to the roots of these two great civilizations, and offers us a glimpse of some of the common values shared by two of the most important literary works handed down by Chinese and Western civilization from their beginnings.

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